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THE
CREED OF CHRISTENDOM:

ITS FOUNDATIONS CONTRASTED WITH ITS
SUPERSTRUCTURE

BY
WILLIAM RATHBONE GREG

"The Prayer of Ajax was for Light."

*With a Preface by W. R. WASHINGTON SULLIVAN, Author of
"Morality as a Religion," "Ethical Interpretations," etc.*

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"I should, perhaps, be a happier, at all events a more useful, man, if my mind were otherwise constituted. But so it is : and even with regard to Christianity itself, like certain plants, I creep towards the light, even though it draw me away from the more nourishing warmth. Yea, I should do so, even if the light made its way through a rent in the wall of the Temple."—COLERIDGE.

"Perplex'd in faith, but pure in deeds,
At last he beat his music out ;
There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds.
"He fought his doubts and gather'd strength ;
He would not make his judgment blind ;
He faced the spectres of the mind,
And laid them : thus he came at length
"To find a stronger faith his own ;
And Power was with him in the night,
Which makes the darkness and the light,
And dwells not in the light alone,
"But in the darkness and the cloud."

—TENNYSON.

"No inquirer can fix a direct and clear-sighted gaze towards Truth who is casting side glances all the while on the prospects of his soul."—MARTINEAU.

"What hope of answer or redress?
Behind the veil, behind the veil."

—TENNYSON.

PREFACE

A FEW explanatory words may be deemed necessary to a new and revised edition of a work which aroused so much interest, and earned the generous approval of all competent to offer an unbiassed opinion, when it appeared over half a century ago. The *Creed of Christendom*, in spite of the damaging character of its analysis of the historic documents and of the *ethos* of popular Christianity; in spite, too, of the comparatively expensive price at which it was issued, has passed through nine editions—no mean tribute to its excellence. Its success was not due to the novelty of the method or the arguments of its author: as he himself candidly admits, it is the work of a man with the ordinary education of an English gentleman, deeply interested in the religious problem, and perplexed by the difficulties besetting the traditional Belief. Nothing he advances was new to the serious student of Religion, even in the fifties; his masters are, in the main, such well-known Continental authorities as De Wette and Baur; but he presents the results of their labours with a freshness and a force; in a spirit at once so manly and modest, so sincere, high-minded and devout, as to compel the attention of unprejudiced, truth-loving men. In the half-century that has elapsed the critical positions, both as regards the Old and the New Testament, have been very notably advanced, but the author has nothing to disavow. No conclusion of his has been invalidated by subsequent inquiry; the progress of research has but confirmed his judgment where it has not enlarged its scope and extended his criticisms beyond his original purview. It has, therefore, been thought advisable to allow the text to stand as he left it in his ninth edition, and merely to add an occasional note, within parentheses, indicating the main advances in Critical Knowledge tending to modify his conclusions on such matters as the date of the Gospels and some of the Epistles. Space, however, has made it necessary to compress the ample material of his two volumes, and even to omit some entire chapters, such as that on the modern refinements of the doctrine of inspiration; on miracles; on the limits of reliance to be placed on Apostolic authority, and the

problem of the Future Life, which, it may be mentioned, he confesses his inability to solve. Mr. Greg is interesting and suggestive as usual in handling these subjects, but their omission does not, it is believed, impair the general effectiveness of his argument. Nothing vitally necessary to it is sacrificed, and more than enough is retained to substantiate his main conclusion, that the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament are inadequate to the controversial burden, placed on them by the Reformers, of guaranteeing the credibility of the incomprehensible tenets of orthodoxy.

The increased interest now generally felt in Biblical studies in England, coupled with the growing consciousness of the unsettled and thoroughly unsatisfactory condition of the religious problem, seems to promise a still wider popularity for so admirably lucid, temperate, and reverent a statement of the case against the popular Creed. Such a book should prove for many a valuable introduction to the rational study of Religion, and notably contribute to the cause of genuine reformation by the exposure of the untenable nature of the traditional teaching. The path of enlightenment is most effectually barred by the common assumption of the inerrancy of the Scripture record in all matters of belief and conduct. This work is designedly re-published as a compendious refutation of the claims of Religion built on authority, Biblical or ecclesiastical; as an incentive to the study of the religious question, and an encouragement to the cultivation of habits of thought and self-reliance in matters of belief. The moral of the book is that a man should learn to think for himself. "He," says Zschokke, "who does not like living in the *furnished lodgings of tradition* must build his own house, his own system of thought and faith, for himself."

W. R. WASHINGTON SULLIVAN.

January, 1905.

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PREFACE

THIS work was commenced in the year 1845, and was finished in 1848. Thus much it is necessary to state, that I may not be supposed to have borrowed without acknowledgment from works which have preceded mine in order of publication.

It is now given to the world after long hesitation, with much diffidence, and with some misgiving. For some time I was in doubt as to the propriety of publishing a work which, if it might correct and elevate the views of some, might also unsettle and destroy the faith of many. But three considerations have finally decided me.

First. I reflected that, if I were right in believing that I had discerned some fragments or gleams of truth which had been missed by others, I should be acting a criminal and selfish part if I allowed personal considerations to withhold me from promulgating them; that I was not entitled to take upon myself the privilege of judging what amount of new light the world could bear, nor what would be the effect of that light upon individual minds; that sound views are formed and established by the contribution, generation after generation, of widows' mites; that, if my small quota were of any value, it would spread and fructify, and, if worthless, would come to naught.

Secondly. Much observation of the conversation and controversy of the religious world had wrought the conviction that the evil resulting from the received notions as to Scriptural authority has been immensely under-estimated. I was compelled to see that there is scarcely a low and dishonouring conception of God current among men, scarcely a narrow and malignant passion of

the human heart, scarcely a moral obliquity, scarcely a political error or misdeed, which Biblical texts are not, and may not be, without any violence to their obvious signification, adduced to countenance and justify. On the other hand, I was compelled to see how many clear, honest, and aspiring minds have been hampered and baffled in their struggles after truth and light, how many tender, pure, and loving hearts have been hardened, perverted, and forced to a denial of their nobler nature and their better instincts, by the ruthless influence of some passages of Scripture which seemed in the clearest language to condemn the good and to denounce the true. No work contributed more than Mr. Newman's *Phases of Faith* to force upon me the conviction that little progress can be hoped for, either for religious science or charitable feeling, till the question of Biblical authority shall have been placed upon a sounder footing, and viewed in a very different light.

Thirdly. I called to mind the probability that there were many other minds like my own pursuing the same inquiries, and groping towards the same light; and that to all such the knowledge that they have fellow-labourers where they least expected it must be a cheering and sustaining influence.

It was also clear to me that this work must be performed by laymen. Clergymen of all denominations are, from the very nature of their position, incapacitated from pursuing this subject with a perfect freedom from all ulterior considerations. They are restrained and shackled at once by their previous confession of Faith, and by the

consequences to them of possible conclusions. It remained, therefore, too see what could be done by an unfettered layman, endowed with no learning, but bringing to the investigation the ordinary education of an English gentleman, and a logical faculty exercised in other walks.

The three conclusions which I have chiefly endeavoured to make clear are these: that the tenet of the Inspiration of the Scriptures is baseless and untenable under any form or modification which leaves to it a dogmatic value; that the Gospels are not textually faithful records of the sayings and actions of Jesus, but, occasionally at least, ascribe to Him words which He never uttered and deeds which He never did; and that the Apostles only partially comprehended, and imperfectly transmitted, the teaching of their Great Master. The establishment of these points is the contribution to the progress of religious science which I have attempted to render.

I trust it will not be supposed that I regard this work in any other light than as a *pioneering* one. A treatise on religion that is chiefly negative and critical can never be other than incomplete, partial, and preparatory. But the clearing of the ground is a necessary preliminary to the growing of the seed; the removal of superincumbent rubbish is indispensable to the discovery and extraction of the buried and intermingled ore; and the liberation of the mind from forestalling misconceptions, misleading prejudices, and hampering and distracting fears must precede its setting forth, with any chance of success, in the pursuit of Truth.

Nor, I earnestly hope, will the book be regarded as antagonistic to the Faith of Christ. It is with a strong conviction that popular Christianity is not the religion of Jesus that I have resolved to publish my views. What Jesus really did and taught, and whether his doctrines were perfect or superhuman, are questions which afford ample matter for an independent work.

There is probably no position more safe and certain than that our religious views

must, of necessity, be *essentially* imperfect and incorrect; that at best they can only form a remote approximation to the truth, while the amount of error they contain *must* be large and varying, and *may* be almost unlimited. And this must be alike, though not equally, the case, whether these views are taught us by reason or by revelation—that is, whether we arrive at them by the diligent and honest use of those faculties with which God has endowed us, or by listening to those prophets whom he may have ordained to teach us. The difference cannot be more than this: that in the latter case our views will contain that fragment, or that human disguise, of positive truth which God knows our minds are alone capable of receiving, or which he sees to be fitted for their guidance; while in the former case they will contain that form or fragment of the same positive truth which he framed our minds with the capability of achieving. In the one case they will contain as much truth as we can take in, in the other as much as we can discover; but in both cases this truth must necessarily not only be greatly limited, but greatly alloyed, to bring it within the competence of finite human intelligences. Being finite, we *can* form no correct or adequate idea of the Infinite; being material, we *can* form no clear conception of the Spiritual. The question of a Revelation can in no way affect this conclusion, since even the omnipotence of God cannot infuse infinite conceptions into finite minds—cannot, without an entire change of the conditions of our being, pour a just and full knowledge of his nature into the bounded capacity of a mortal's soul. Human intelligence could not grasp it; human language could not express it.

"The consciousness of the individual [says Fichte] reveals itself *alone*; his knowledge cannot pass beyond the limits of his own being. His conceptions of other things and other beings are *only his conceptions*; they are not those things or beings themselves. The living principle of a living Universe must be infinite, while all our ideas and conceptions are finite, and

applicable only to finite beings. The Deity is thus not an object of knowledge, but of faith, not to be approached by the understanding, but by the moral sense; not to be conceived, but to be felt. All attempts to embrace the infinite in the conception of the finite are, and must be, only accommodations to the frailty of man.....

"Atheism is a charge which the common understanding has repeatedly brought against the finer speculations of philosophy, when, in endeavouring to solve the riddle of existence, they have approached, albeit with reverence and humility, the source from which all existence proceeds. Shrouded from human comprehension in an obscurity from which chastened imagination is awed back, and thought retreats in conscious weakness, the Divine nature is surely a theme on which man is little entitled to dogmatise. Accordingly, it is here that the philosophic intellect becomes most painfully aware of its own insufficiency.....But the common understanding has no such humility; its God is an Incarnate Divinity; imperfection imposes its own limitations on the Illimitable, and clothes the inconceivable Spirit of the Universe in sensuous and intelligible forms derived from finite nature!"

This conviction once gained, the whole rational basis for intolerance is cut away. We are all of us, though not equally, mistaken, and the cherished dogmas of each of us are not, as we had fondly supposed, the pure truth of God, but simply our own special form of error—the fragmentary and refracted ray of light which has fallen on our own minds.¹

But are we, therefore, to relax in our pursuit of truth, or to acquiesce contentedly in error? By no means. The obligation still lies upon us as much as ever to press forward in the search; for, though absolute truth is unattainable, yet the amount of error in our views is capable of progressive

and perpetual diminution, and it is not to be supposed that all errors are equally innocuous. To rest satisfied with a lower degree of truth than our faculties are capable of attaining, to acquiesce in errors which we might eliminate, to lie down consciously and contentedly in unworthy conceptions of the Nature and Providence of God, is treason alike to him and to our own soul. It is true that all our ideas concerning the Eternal Spirit must, considered objectively, be erroneous, and that no revelation can make them otherwise; all, therefore, that we require, or can obtain, is such an image or idea of him as shall satisfy our souls and meet our needs, as shall (we may say) be to us subjectively true. But this conception, in order to become to us such satisfying and subjective truth, must, of course, be the highest and noblest that our minds are capable of forming;² every man's conception of God must consequently vary with his mental cultivation and mental powers. If he content himself with any lower image than his intellect can grasp, he contents himself with that which is *false to him*, as well as false in fact—one which, being lower than he could reach, he must *ipso facto* feel to be false. The peasant's idea of God—true to him—would be false to me, because I should feel it to be unworthy and inadequate. If the nineteenth century after Christ adopts the conceptions of the nineteenth century before him, if cultivated and chastened Christians adopt the conceptions of the ignorant, narrow, and vindictive Israelite, they are guilty of *thinking worse of God*, of taking a lower, meaner, more limited view of his nature, than the faculties he has bestowed are capable of inspiring; and, as the highest view we are capable of forming must necessarily be the nearest to the truth, they are wilfully acquiescing in a lie—they are guilty of what Bacon calls "the apotheosis of error," stereotyping and canonising one particular stage of the blunders through which thought passes on its way to truth.

¹ "Our little systems have their day;
They have their day, and cease to be;
They are but broken lights of Thee,
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they."
—*In Memoriam*.

² Religious truth is therefore necessarily progressive, because our powers are progressive—a position fatal to positive dogma.

Now, to think (or speak) ill of God is to incur the guilt of blasphemy. It is surprising that this view of the matter should so rarely have struck the orthodox; but they are so intently occupied with the peril on one side that they have become blind or careless to the, at least, equal peril that lies on the other. If, as they deem, erroneous belief be dangerous and criminal, it must be so whether it err on the side of deficiency or of excess. They are sensitively and morbidly alive to the peril and the sin of not believing everything which Revelation has announced, yet they are utterly blind to what should be regarded as the deeper peril and the darker guilt of believing that Revelation has announced doctrines dishonouring to the pure majesty of God. If it be wrong and dangerous to doubt what God has told us of Himself, it must surely be equally so, or more so, to believe, on inadequate evidence, or on no evidence at all, that He ever taught doctrines so derogatory to His attributes as many which orthodox theology ascribes to Him. To believe that he is cruel, short-sighted, capricious, and unjust is an affront, an indignity, which (on the orthodox supposition that God takes judicial cognisance of such errors) must be immeasurably more guilty and more perilous than to believe that the Jews were mistaken in imagining that He spoke through Moses, or the Christians in imagining he spoke through Paul. He is affirmed to be a jealous God, an angry God, a capricious God, punishing the innocent for the sins of the guilty, punishing with infinite and endless torture men whom He had created weak, finite, and ephemeral—nay, whom He had fore-ordained to sin—a God who came down from heaven, walked among men, feasted at their tables, endured their insults, died by their hands. Is there no peril in all this, no sin in believing all these unworthy puerilities of a Creator who has given us Reason and Nature to teach us better things? Yet countless Christians accept them all with hasty and trembling dismay as if afraid that God will punish them for being slow to believe evil of Him.

We have seen that the highest views of religion which we can attain here must, from the imperfection of our faculties, be necessarily inaccurate and impure; but we may go further than this. It is more than probable that religion, in order to obtain currency and influence with the great mass of mankind, must be alloyed with an amount of error which places it far below the standard attainable by human capacities. A pure religion—by which we mean one as pure as the loftiest and most cultivated earthly reason can discern—would probably not be comprehended by, or effective over, the less-educated portion of mankind. What is truth to the philosopher would not be truth, nor have the effect of truth, to the peasant. The religion of the many must necessarily be more incorrect than that of the refined and reflective few, not so much in its essence as in its forms, not so much in the spiritual idea which lies latent at the bottom of it as in the symbols and dogmas in which that idea is embodied. In many points true religion would not be comprehensible by the ignorant, nor consolatory to them, nor guiding and supporting for them. Nay, *true religion would not be true to them*—that is, the effect it would produce on their mind *would not be the right one*, would not be the same it would produce on the mind of one fitted to receive it and competent to grasp it. To undisciplined minds, as to children, it is probable that coarser images and broader views are necessary to excite and sustain the efforts of virtue. The belief in an *immediate* heaven of sensible delight and glory will enable an uneducated man to dare the stake in the cause of faith or freedom; the idea of Heaven as a distant scene of slow, patient, and perpetual progress in intellectual and spiritual being would be inadequate to fire his imagination or to steel his nerves. Again, to be grasped by, and suitable to, such minds, the views presented them of God must be anthropomorphic, not spiritual, and in proportion as they are so they are false; the views of His government must be special, not universal, and in proportion as they are so they will

be false. The sanctions which a faith derives from being announced from Heaven amid clouds and thunder, and attested by physical prodigies, are of a nature to attract and impress the rudest and most ignorant minds, perhaps in proportion to their rudeness and their ignorance. The sanctions derived from accordance with the breathings of Nature and the dictates of the soul are appreciable in their full strength by the trained and nurtured intelligence alone.*

The rapid spread and general reception of any religion may unquestionably be accepted as proof that it contains some vital truth; it may be regarded also as an equally certain proof that it contains a large admixture of error—of error, that is, cognisable and detectable by the higher human minds of the age. A perfectly pure faith would find too little preparation for it in the common mind and heart to admit of prompt reception. The Christian religion would hardly have spread as rapidly as it did had it remained as pure as it came from the lips of Jesus. It owes its success probably at least as much to the corruptions which speedily encrusted it, and to the errors which were early incorporated with it, as to the ingredient of pure and sublime truth which it contained. Its progress among the Jews was owing to the doctrine of the Messiahship, which they erroneously believed to be fulfilled in Jesus. Its rapid progress among the Pagans was greatly attributable to its metaphysical accretions and its heathen corruptions. Had it retained its original purity and simplicity, had it been kept free from all extraneous admixtures, a system of noble Theism and lofty morality, as Christ de-

livered it, where would it now have been? Would it have reached our times as a substantive religion? Would truth have floated down to us without borrowing the wings of error? These are interesting, though purely speculative, questions.

One word in conclusion. Let it not be supposed that the conclusions sought to be established in this book have been arrived at eagerly, or without pain and reluctance. The pursuit of truth is easy to a man who has no human sympathies, whose vision is impaired by no fond partialities, whose heart is torn by no divided allegiance. To him the renunciation of error presents few difficulties; for the moment it is recognised as error its charm ceases. But the case is very different with the searcher whose affections are strong, whose associations are quick, whose hold upon the past is clinging and tenacious. He may love truth with an earnest and paramount devotion, but he loves much else also. He loves errors which were once the cherished convictions of his soul. He loves dogmas which were once full of strength and beauty to his thoughts, though now perceived to be baseless or fallacious. He loves the church where he worshipped in his happy childhood, where his friends and his family worship still, where his grey-haired parents await the resurrection of the just, but where *he* can worship and await no more. He loves the simple old creed which was the creed of his earlier and brighter days, which is the creed of his wife and children still, but which inquiry has compelled him to abandon. The past and the familiar have chains and talismans which hold him back in his career, till every fresh step forward becomes an effort and an agony, every fresh error discovered is a fresh bond snapped asunder, every new glimpse of light is like a fresh flood of pain poured in upon the soul. To such a man the pursuit of truth is a daily martyrdom—how hard and bitter let the martyr tell. Shame to those who make it doubly so; honour to those who encounter it saddened, weeping, trembling, but unflinching still.

* All who have come much into contact with the minds of children or of the uneducated classes are fully aware how unfitted to their mental condition are the more wide, catholic, and comprehensive views of religion, which yet we hold to be the true ones, and how essential it is to them to have a well-defined, positive, somewhat dogmatic, and, above all, a divinely-attested and *authoritative* creed, deriving its sanctions from without. Such are best dealt with by rather narrow, decided, and undoubting minds.

To this martyrdom, however, we believe there is an end; for this unswerving integrity there is a rich and sure reward. Those who flinch from inquiry because they dread the possible conclusion; who turn aside from the path as soon as they catch a glimpse of an unwelcome goal; who hold their dearest hopes only on the tenure of a closed eye and a repudiating mind—will, sooner or later, have to encounter that inevitable hour when doubt will not be silenced, and inquiry can no longer be put by; when the spectres of old misgivings which have been rudely repulsed, and of questionings which have been sent empty away, will return “to

haunt, to startle, to waylay”; and will then find their faith crumbling away at the moment of greatest need, not because it is false, but because they, half-wilfully, half fearfully, grounded it on false foundations. But the man whose faith in God and futurity has survived an inquiry pursued with that “single eye” to which alone light is promised has attained a serenity of soul possible only to the fearless and the just. For him the progress of science is fraught with no dark possibilities of ruin; no dreaded discoveries lie in wait for him round the corner; since he is indebted for his short and simple creed, not to sheltering darkness, but to conquered light.

INTRODUCTION TO THE THIRD EDITION

THIS book was originally published nearly a quarter of a century ago. Its sale, since then, though by no means large, has been singularly continuous and regular—the number of copies taken by the public having scarcely varied from year to year; and the second edition was disposed of somewhat more rapidly than the first. It is, therefore, fair to conclude that the work met a permanent want felt by many of my countrymen which no other writings at the time accessible to them could furnish, and at least temporarily filled a gap in our literature which, so far as I am aware, has not since been otherwise supplied. During the period that has elapsed since its publication, moreover, I have received many gratifying and even touching testimonies both from friends and strangers as to the assistance which it rendered them and the comfort which it suggested to them, when their minds were perplexed and agitated by the doubts and the questions which had disturbed my own. Under these circumstances I have acceded without demur to the wish of my publisher to issue a new and revised edition.

I have re-perused every chapter with great care, but I have added little and altered less. Here and there I have modified a phrase where I thought I had expressed myself too confidently or too harshly, or where I appeared to have fallen into incorrectness or exaggeration; but the changes introduced have been few and slight. On the whole, I thought it wisest and fairest to leave the text as it originally stood, bearing distinct marks of the date at which it was written, when the topics discussed were comparatively new to English readers, and

when the several authors who have since handled them, and thrown so much light upon them, had not yet put their views before the world. But I have re-considered every point with caution, and I am sure with candour; I have read with attention and respect, and with a real desire to profit, the various criticisms and replies which the book on its first publication called forth; and I am bound to say that I see no reason to believe that I was in error as to any essential point. The progress made in Biblical criticism and historical science during the last five-and-twenty years has furnished abundant confirmation, but I think refutation in no single instance. It is in no spirit of elation or self-applause that I say this—even if with some unfeigned surprise; for I know better than most with how little learning the book was written, and how much learning—to say nothing of genius and insight—has since been brought to bear on the subject. Strauss's great work had, indeed, been published and translated into English before my work appeared; but Bishop Colenso's *Inquiry into the Pentateuch*, *Ecce Homo*, Renan's *Vie de Jésus* and his Apostolic volumes, *The Jesus of History*, by Sir H. D. Hanson, Chief Justice of South Australia—a work well worth perusal, as having in some degree a special standpoint of its own, and showing the impression made by the evidence adducible on a trained legal mind—and Arnold's *Literature and Dogma*, are all of much later date.

* * * * *

It was remarked by a friendly critic of my first edition that, in approaching the question of the resurrection of Christ from

the side of the Gospels instead of from that of the Epistles, I had thrown away the main strength of the case. The criticism is just, and in deference to it I have since reconsidered the subject from the point of view suggested. The Epistles were of prior date to the Gospels;^{*} the earliest statement, therefore, that we possess of the fact of the resurrection, as well as the only one whose author we know for certain, is that contained in Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians xv. 3-8. Leaving out of view the Gospels, then, the evidence of the great foundation doctrine of the Christian creed consists in these two indisputable points—that all the Apostles and disciples believed it, had no doubt about it, held it with a conviction so absolute that it inspired them with zeal and courage to live as missionaries, and to die as martyrs; and that Paul, five-and-twenty years after the event, wrote of it thus: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,"[†] and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the Twelve; after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at

^{*} The date of the Gospels is at best conjectural. No authority, however, we believe, would place even the earliest of them before A.D. 60 or 65, many much later. Now, the Epistle to the Corinthians was written almost certainly about A.D. 57, and the other Pauline writings between 52 and 68. (*See Conybeare and Howson.*)

[This note reflects the judgment of the author's time. For a compendious statement of the latest views on the date of the Gospels, and of the Epistles bearing the name of Paul, see the *Encyclopædia Biblica* under "Gospels" and "Paul," and the several epistles. See also Mr. Whittaker's *Origins of Christianity* (Watts).]

[†] Our readers will not fail to notice the shadow of doubt which the expression "according to the Scriptures" throws over even this direct testimony. "According to the Scriptures" simply means, whenever it occurs, "in supposed fulfilment of the erroneous interpretation of the Old Testament Psalms and Prophecies then current." Paul, moreover, it should be observed, here merely speaks at second-hand, and declares *what he had been told* by others, "that which I also received."

once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that he was seen of James, then of all the Apostles. And, last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due season."

Now, if this were all, if we had no further testimony to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead than that it was believed by the whole original Christian Church, that the Apostles and personal followers of Christ, who must be supposed to have had the best means of knowing it, clung to the conviction enthusiastically, and witnessed to it by their preaching and their death; and that Paul, not a personal follower, but in constant communication with those who were, made the above assertions in a letter addressed to one of the principal Churches, and published while most of the eye-witnesses to whom he appeals were still alive to confirm or to contradict his statements; if the case rested on this only, and terminated here, every one, I think, would feel that our grounds for accepting the resurrection as an historical fact in its naked simplicity would be far stronger than they actually are. In truth, they would appear to be nearly unassailable and irresistible, except by those who can imagine some probable mode in which such a positive and vivifying conviction could have grown up without the actual occurrence having taken place to create it. Such explanation has been offered by many writers—by Strauss, by Renan, by Arnold, by Hanson, and others. I have considered them all, I think, dispassionately; and, ingenious as they are (especially the detailed one of M. Renan), I am bound to say they do not satisfy my mind—they do not convince me, I mean, that the belief arose as they suggest. They are very skilful, they are even probable enough; but they do not make me feel that the true solution of the mystery has been reached. Nor can I, with any confidence, offer one of my own, though I can *conceive* one more simple and inherently likely than those propounded.

But the real difficulty lies in the Gospel narratives. The evangelists contradict the

apostle. Nay, more; they show that the belief of the Christian Church was not simple, uniform, and self-consistent, as Paul's statement would lead us to suppose, but that it was singularly vague, various, and self-contradictory. Nay, worse still; they not only show in how many fluctuating shapes it existed, but they suggest how the belief may have formed itself by specifying a number of the circumstantial details around which it grew and solidified so rapidly. In the Epistles and the Acts we find simply the assertion of the fact, and evidence to the universal conviction. In the Gospels we read the several traditions accepted in the Christian community, thirty or more years after the event, as to the nature and surrounding context of that event. Now, here commences our serious embarrassment; and the embarrassment consists in this, that the new witnesses called—possibly very incompetent ones—make it impossible to arrive at any clear or definite conclusion as to the *what* or the *how*. That is to say, *we cannot frame any theory whatever as to the resurrection, which is not distinctly negatived by one or the other of the evangelical accounts*. If the occurrence were to rest only on the Gospel narratives, rational belief would be almost out of the question. If the belief in the early Church had been based upon these narratives (which it was not), that belief could carry with it only the faintest authority. Let us follow out this view a little in detail.

Some have imagined that the reappearance of the risen Jesus to his disciples was of the nature of those apparitions of departed friends as to the occurrence of which there exists such a mass of overwhelming testimony; and the related mode of his appearances and disappearances give some *prima facie* colouring to the idea. He *vanished out of the sight* of the companions at Emmaus; he *ceased to be seen of them*. When the disciples were assembled at Jerusalem, *Jesus himself stood in the midst of them* (John adds in two passages, *that the doors were shut*.) "While he blessed them *he was parted from them*, and carried up into heaven." In the Acts, *a cloud*

received him out of their sight. This view may be said, moreover, to be countenanced by the language of Paul himself, who classes the appearance of Jesus to himself, along with his appearances to others; yet *his*, we know, was an apparition (rather an *audition*, for he speaks of hearing him, not of seeing him). But, then, this theory is distinctly negatived by the assertions that Jesus assured the affrighted disciples (who had imagined him to be an apparition) that he was actually thus present *in flesh and bones*, his real old *self*, with hands and feet, and bodily organs, and able and desirous to eat. In fact, Jesus seems positively to have refused to be considered in the light of the supernatural being his startled followers would at once have made of him, and did make of him shortly after.

Others, again, adopt the supposition that Jesus did not actually die on the cross, but merely swooned and revived naturally, or by the aid of Joseph of Arimathea, when taken down and laid in a temporary sepulchre. And this theory has many considerations in its favour, all of which are discussed by Strauss and Renan. It appears, though the several accounts do not tally very closely, that he was not more than *six* hours, or perhaps not more than *four*, upon the cross (how long in the grave we do not know—perhaps not an hour); and that, though so highly-wrought and delicate an organisation as that of Jesus must have been might well have succumbed to even that brief period of agony, yet that such speedy death from crucifixion was most unusual, and excited the surprise of Pilate. On this supposition, the subsequent appearances narrated in Luke and Matthew are simple and natural enough, nor need we trouble ourselves to speculate on his after-history and final disappearance from the scene; but, then, this theory neutralises entirely the religious value of the occurrence, besides being irreconcilable with the "non-recognition" feature of the narratives, to which I now proceed.

This feature is, in truth, the terrible embarrassment which the Gospel narratives present to those who hold the common

creed on the subject of the resurrection. Those narratives relate that many of the disciples who saw him after he rose from the dead did not recognise him. They relate this of three or four of his most remarkable appearances. Those who had lived with him for years, and who had parted from him on the Friday, did not know him again on the Sunday. If, then, he was so changed, so entirely not his former self, that they could not recognise him, *how could they know, or how can we know, that the person assumed to be Jesus was actually their risen Lord?* Does not this non-recognition almost irresistibly suggest the inferences, that the excited imaginations of his more susceptible disciples assumed some stranger to be Jesus, when they learned that his body had disappeared from the sepulchre, and that angels had affirmed that he was risen, and that those "whose eyes were holden," who "doubted," or "did not believe for joy and wonder," were the more prosaic and less impressive of the beholders? The difficulty is obviously tremendous: let us look at the particulars.

Matthew relates two appearances, in very general terms. Of the second he says, "but some doubted." Mark—the genuine Gospel of Mark, which, as we know, terminates with the 8th verse of the 16th chapter—says nothing of any appearances; but, in the spurious addition, repeats twice that those who asserted that they had seen him were disbelieved, and that Christ, when he appeared himself to the eleven, "upbraided them with their unbelief." Luke narrates two appearances, and incidentally mentions that "the eleven" reported a third "to Simon." With reference to the first, he says of the two disciples, Cleophas and a friend, who walked, talked, and ate with Jesus at Emmaus for several hours, "their eyes were holden that they should not know him." With reference to the second appearance ("to the eleven"), it is said, first, "that they were affrighted, thinking they had seen a spirit," and, shortly afterwards, that "they yet believed not for joy, and wondered." But

it is in the fourth Gospel that the non-recognition feature becomes most marked. Mary Magdalene, after Jesus had spoken to her and she had turned to look at him, still "supposed him to be the gardener." His most intimate disciples, when they saw him in Galilee, "knew not that it was Jesus," even though he spoke to them; and even John himself only *inferred* the presence of his master in consequence of the miraculous draught of fishes, and Peter only accepted the inference on John's authority. "Therefore, that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, 'It is the Lord.' Now, when Simon Peter *heard that it was the Lord*, he girt on his fisher's coat and did cast himself into the sea."

One more difficulty—a very grave one—raised by the traditional accounts transmitted to us in the Gospels, must be indicated, but needs nothing beyond indication. These accounts all insist, in the strongest manner, upon the detailed demonstration that it was Jesus in bodily shape, in the same actual form, with the same hands and feet, and the same digestive organs and human needs, whom they had known three days before, and had seen nailed to the cross, who now again came among them and conversed with them. Jesus himself is made to assure them that he was not a spirit, but flesh and bones that could be handled. In this well-known presence, with these bodily organs and this earthly frame, he is said to have been seen to ascend into heaven. Can flesh and blood inherit the spiritual kingdom, or where was the body dropped, and when was the transmutation carried out?

But, now, instead of taking the Gospel narratives as they stand promiscuously and as a whole, let us discard those portions which are certainly or most probably un-genuine or spurious, and take into consideration only that residue which may be fairly assumed to embody the earliest traditions of the Christian community, and we shall find most of the difficulties we have just mentioned either vastly mitigated or quite dispersed. In fact—and I would draw particular attention to this conclusion—we who

show that the Gospels are rather traditional than strictly historical narratives, absolutely authoritative and correct, are the persons who do special service to the doctrine of the resurrection by removing obstacles to its credibility. The whole of the accounts in the fourth Gospel then fall away and cease to embarrass us at all. At most, they only serve to indicate how tradition had been at work, and grown between the first and the second century—at least one generation, possibly two. Mark, probably the earliest writer of all, never presented any embarrassment at all—unless, indeed, a negative one—for he says not a word of post-sepulchral appearances, and merely mentions the appearance of “a young man” at the tomb, who tells the disciples simply, and as a message, that Jesus is no longer there, but has gone before them into Galilee.¹ Matthew, again, deals in general terms, and gives an account almost identical with that of Paul, though even less full and particular.² Luke, alone, remains to trouble us; Luke, who probably wrote when apparitional accounts had begun to multiply and magnify; whose perplexing narrative about Emmaus is not even alluded to by any of the other evangelists, and must almost certainly have been unknown to them; and who directly contradicts Matthew as to the alleged command of Jesus that they should go into Galilee to meet him. Matthew says, “go into Galilee.” Luke says, “tarry in Jerusalem.” Looking, then, at the matter in this light, we may not unfairly accept Paul’s statement as embodying the whole of the recognised and authorised tradition of the early Church on the subject of the appearances of the crucified and risen Jesus. This assertion, and the general and absolute conviction of the apostolic community, remain as our warrant for believing

in the miraculous resurrection of our Lord. *Are they adequate?* This is practically the residual question calling for decision.

It is perhaps far less important than is commonly fancied. I have already (Chapter XIII.) given my reasons for holding that, except it be regarded as establishing, and *as needed to establish*, the authority of the teaching of Christ, his resurrection has no bearing—certainly no favourable or confirmatory bearing—on the question of *our* future life.

Just as the confident conviction of the earliest Christians, and the mighty influence that conviction exercised over their character and actions, constitute the chief evidence of the resurrection of Christ, so the existence of the Christian faith, its vast mark in history, and its establishment over the most powerful, progressive, and intellectual races of mankind, constitute the strongest testimony we possess to its value and its truth. This may, or may not, be sufficient to prove its divine origin and its absolute correctness, but it is the best we have, and is more cogent by far than any documentary evidence could be. Christianity, as it prevails over all Europe and America, constituting the cherished creed, and at least the professed and revered moral guide of probably two hundred millions of the foremost nations upon earth, is a marvellous fact which requires accounting for, a mighty effect indicating a cause or causes of corresponding efficacy. Whatever we may conclude as to its origin, that origin must, in one way or other, have been adequate to the subsequent growth. In some sense, in some form, the victory of the Christian religion must be due to some inherent energy, excellence, vitality, suitability to the wants and character of man. Mere circumstances could not explain this victory. We may safely go a step further, and say that this vital force, this inherent excellence, this appropriateness, must have been something strange, subtle, unexampled. Those who conclude it, in consequence, to have been a special divine revelation offer

¹ The word he uses, moreover, is significant: he says, *ἡγερθῆναι*, “he is risen,” not *ἀναστὰς*, he is risen from the dead.

² Moreover, it is the opinion of some very competent critics that the concluding portion of the last chapter of Matthew is not entitled to the same character of indisputable genuineness as the rest of the Gospel.

what we must admit to be *prima facie* the simplest and easiest solution.

But the argument, as just stated, must not be pushed too far. Three considerations serve to indicate with how much caution, with what a large survey of history, with what a wide grasp and deep analysis of the phenomena of mind in various times and among various races, the problem must be approached. Christianity is not the most widely spread of the religions of mankind. Buddhism is of earlier date, and counts more millions among its votaries. Islamism took its rise later, was diffused more rapidly, and rules over a larger area of the earth's surface. At one time it seemed as if Christianity would go down before its triumphant career. Some readers of history may even be disposed to argue that but for two men and two battles—possibly but for a special charge of cavalry, or it may be a sudden inspiration of the leading generals—it might have done so. The spread of Buddhism, the spread of Islamism, must have had an adequate cause, as well as the spread of Christianity.

Again, the enthroned position and commanding influence of our religion testify, with power which we make no pretence of resisting, to its truth and its surpassing excellences. So much no sceptic, we fancy, would wish, or would venture, to deny. But this testimony is borne to CHRISTIANITY, not any dogma of the creed carelessly called by that name; to *something* inherent and essential in the religion—not to any particular thing which this or that sect chooses to specify as its essence. It does not testify at all—at least, the orthodox are not entitled to assume that it does—to the divinity of our Lord, to his miraculous resurrection, to his atoning blood, to the Trinitarian mystery, or to any one of the scholastic problems into which the Athanasian Creed has endeavoured to condense the faith of Christendom; it may testify only, we believe it does, to that apocalypse and exemplification of the possibilities of holiness and loveliness latent in humanity, which was embodied in the unique life and character of Jesus.

And, thirdly, it must be admitted without recalcitration, though the admission carries with it some vague and startling alarm of danger, that Christianity, with all its unapproached truth and beauty, owes its rapid progress, and, in some vast degree, its wide and firm dominion, at least as distinctly, if not as much, to the errors which were early mingled with it as to the central and faultless ideas those errors overlaid. On one point, at least, all—even the thinking minds among the most orthodox—will agree: that the mightiest and most inspiring conviction among the earliest Christians, that which vivified their zeal, warmed their eloquence, made death easy, and fear impossible—that which, in fact, more than any other influence, *caused* their victories—was their unhesitating belief in the approaching end of the world and the speedy coming of their Lord in glory. That this was an entire delusion we now all acknowledge. Many of us go much further. Few will doubt that the doctrine of the Messiahship of Jesus aided most powerfully the triumph of his religion among the Jews, and that of his proper deity among the Gentiles (not to mention other scholastic and pagan accretions); and many now hold that these are as indisputable delusions as the other. In a word, truth has floated down to us upon the wings of error, treasured up and borne along in an ark built of perishable materials, and by human hands; some devotees, therefore, still cling to the ark and the error as sacred agencies worthy of all reverence and worship, confounding what they have done with what they are. But we do not read that Noah thought it incumbent upon him to continue out of gratitude living in the ark when the waters had subsided. On the contrary, as soon as there was dry firm ground for the sole of his feet, he came forth from his preserving prison-house, and gave thanks and offered sacrifices to the Lord.

"Are we yet Christians?" is the momentous question of the day, which is being asked everywhere in a variety of forms. It is the question asked, and answered in

the negative, in the last remarkable and unsatisfactory volume of Strauss. "Der alte und der neue Glaube." It is the question asked, but not answered, in a striking monograph so entitled, which appeared in a recent number of the *Fortnightly Review*.¹ It is the question which is forcing itself upon the minds of all students of the tone and temper of the times, who cannot fail to recognise, with anxious speculation as to the results, that a vast proportion of the higher and stronger intellect of the age in nearly all branches of science and thought, as well as large bodies, if not the mass, of the most energetic section of the working classes, is, day by day, more and more decidedly and avowedly shaking itself free from every form and variety of established creeds. It is the question, finally, which is implied, rather than openly asked, in the various uneasy and spasmodic, perhaps somewhat blind, attempts on the part of the clergy, in the shape of "Speaker's Commentaries," new churches, open-air preachings, Pan-Anglican Synods, and the like, to meet a danger which they perceive through the mist, but of which they have scarcely yet measured the full significance and bearing.

Are we, then, ceasing to be Christians? Is Christianity as a religion in very truth dying out from among us amid the conflicting or converging influences of this fermenting age? Most observers, seeing Christianity only in the popular shape, and the recognised formularies, feel that there can be little doubt about the matter. Strauss, accepting the "Apostles' Creed" as the received and correct representation of the Christian faith, is just as distinct in his reply:

"If, then, we are to seek no subterfuges, if we are not to halt between two opinions, if our yea is to be yea, and our nay, nay, if we are to speak as honourable and straightforward men, then we must recognise the fact that we are no longer Christians?"

I should give a different reply, but only because I attach to the principal word a

less conventional, but assuredly a more correct and etymological, signification. I entirely refuse to recognise the Apostles' Creed, or the Nicene Creed, or the Westminster Confession, or the Longer or Shorter Catechism, or the formularies of any Church, whether Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinistic, or United, as faithful embodiments or authoritative representations of Christianity. Rightly regarded, the very shape, character, purport, and title of these several documents negative their claims to be accepted as such. Christianity was not, in its origin, a series of sententious propositions, nor a code of laws, nor a system of doctrine, nor a "scheme" of salvation,² but

¹ The very phrase, "scheme of salvation," as applied to Christianity (like a somewhat analogous one often employed, "making our peace with God"), strikes us as offensive, and, when considered in relation to the details of the imagined scheme, almost monstrous. To those who have been brought up to this scheme from infancy of course it is not so (to such nothing would be); but as describing the impression made upon those who come to it later in life, and who look at it from the outside, the word is not too strong. A scheme is a "contrivance"—a contrivance for attaining an object, or getting out of a difficulty; and in the popular orthodox view the Christian dispensation is in plain words—and putting it in plain words will perhaps be found its best and sufficient refutation and dissolution—a "contrivance" concocted between God and his Son, between the first and second persons of the Trinity (or, as we should say, between the Creator of all worlds and Jesus of Nazareth, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"), for enabling the human race to escape from a doom and a curse which certain scholastic theologians fancy (as an inference from particular texts of Scripture) to have been in some way incurred, either from the offences of each individual or from the offence of a remote ancestor. The "scheme" first assumes that the original sin of our first parents (to say nothing of our own) *cannot* be forgiven, nor the taint inherited by their innocent descendants wiped out, without the rigid exaction of a penalty ("damnation," eternal fire, and the like), altogether disproportioned to the offence—that the attributes of the Deity imply and involve this "cannot." Then, since this doom is too horrible and the doctrine laid down in the above assumption too repellent, alike in its basis and its consequences, to be endured or accepted, the "scheme" then imagines the only Son of God (one hour's pain of whom, as a partaker of the divine nature, is an equivalent to the eternal

² March, 1873.

the outcome and combination of a holy life, a noble death, a wonderfully pure and perfect character and nature, a teaching at once self-proving and sublime—the whole absolutely unique in their impressive loveliness. I cannot but remember—what is so strangely though so habitually forgotten by all Christian sects—that this life was lived, this death consummated, this character displayed, this devotion exemplified and inspired, this righteousness preached and embodied, *and this impression made*, years before any convert or disciple conceived the fatal idea of formalising it all into a “creed.” Nay, more, I cannot but remember that it was not till long after the elevating, spiritualising, restraining influence of the actual presence and the daily example of Jesus was withdrawn, that anything fairly to be called “dogma” began to grow up among that apostolic society, whose best leaders even, as is obvious from the Gospel narrative, stood on a moral and intellectual level so far below their Master’s.¹ I recognise

sufferings of all human beings) agreeing to bear this doom instead of the myriads of the offending race. An impossible debt is first invented, necessitating the invention of an inconceivable coin in which to pay it. A God is imagined bent on a design and entertaining sentiments which it seems simple blasphemy and contradiction to ascribe to the father in heaven, whom Jesus of Nazareth came to reveal to us—and then he is represented as abandoning that design in consideration of a sacrifice, in which it is impossible to recognise one gleam of appropriateness or of human equity. What looks very like a legal fiction, purely gratuitous, is got rid of by what looks very like a legal chicanery, purely fanciful. To use a terse simile of Macaulay, the scheme “resembles nothing so much as a forged bond, with a forged release endorsed on the back of it.” But the essential point to bear in mind is that not only do none of the genuine, authentic, indisputable words of Christ contain or countenance this “scheme,” but the entire tone and context of his teaching distinctly ignore it, and are at variance with its fundamental conceptions.

¹ “Is the Apostles’ Creed the original Christianity? we ask. Was it the mission of Jesus to draw up a confession and to give currency to a formulated doctrine, rather than to wake up fresh religious life and to lay down principles which must always hold good in matters of religion for every doctrinal system? Was *he*, who dropped

more and more—what I believe will be generally admitted now—that the articles of faith, the sententious dogmas, the “scheme” of salvation, which have usurped the name of “Christianity” and “the Christian religion,” originated almost wholly with Paul; and that not only did they not form the substance of the teaching of Jesus, but that they are not to be found in, nor can obtain anything beyond the most casual, apparent, and questionable countenance from, his genuine and authentic words. And, finally, I remember and wish to recall to the reflection of my readers that this Paul, who thus transformed the pure, grand religion of his crucified Master, was distinguished by a character of intellect, subtle, metaphysical, and cultured, and therefore singularly discrepant, from that of Jesus; that, moreover, he never knew Jesus upon earth, had never come under his influence, or been sobered by his saintly spirit and his clear, practical conceptions; had never seen him in the flesh, nor heard

everything that was formal and therefore unessential in religion and morality, and preached the fulfilment of the moral element of the law and the prophets, and who, instead of laying down *rules* for the moral life of man, insisted upon *principles* and change of heart—was *he*, who, of all that Israel considered holy in the Scriptures, retained as essential no more than love to God and to one’s neighbour, and preached as the rule of life, ‘Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them, for this is the law and the prophets’—was *he* a dogmatist, a propounder of articles? Was *he*, who made the true moral life of love as independent of Jewish doctrines as of the forms of the Jewish theocracy, who gave its tone to genuine humanity everywhere, even in the Samaritan and the heathen—nay, even placed the humane Samaritan above the orthodox priest and Levite—was *he*, who, without appealing to any ecclesiastical authority of tradition or of Scripture, found his witnesses in the common sense and in the conscience of mankind, and recognised the true prophet by the moral power he displayed—was *he* a dogmatist? Surely Christianity in its original form was not a confession nor a symbol; and to pass judgment on it as such is logically inadmissible.”—Dr. SCHOLTEN, *Theol. Review*, April, 1873.

² [Or rather with *Paulinism*, it not being possible to ascribe the elaborated dogmatism of the longer epistles to the Apostle himself. See note above.]

his voice save in trance, in noönday visions, and ecstatic desert communings.

It was the sincere and earnest, if somewhat ambitious, purpose of this book to disentangle and disencumber the religion taught and lived by Jesus from the misconceptions and accretions which have gathered round it, obscured it, overlaid it, often actually transmuted it, and which began to gather round it almost as soon as its founder had disappeared from the scene of his ministry. I shall have failed if I have not vindicated our right, and shown it to be our duty, to seek that pure original of devotional spirit and righteous life in the authentic words and deeds of Christ, and in these alone; and, in the prosecution of this search, to put aside respectfully but courageously, whenever we see warrant for it, whatever, whether in the Gospels or the Epistles, confuses, obscures, blots, or conflicts with this spirit and this life. I conceive that I have vindicated this right, and established this obligation by showing that even the immediate personal disciples of our Lord misconceived him; that the chief of the Apostles never was a companion or follower of Jesus in any sense, but claimed and gloried in what he declared to be a special, separate, and *post-mortem* revelation; and that even the Gospels contain some things certainly, and several things probably, which did not emanate from Christ.

I am disposed, therefore, to give an entirely opposite answer to Strauss's question to that which Strauss himself has given, and to believe that when we have really penetrated to the actual teaching of Christ, and fairly disinterred that religion of Jesus which preceded all creeds and schemes and formulas, and which we trust will survive them all, we shall find that, so far from this, the true essence of Christianity, being renounced or outgrown by the progressive intelligence of the age, its rescue, re-discovery, purification, and re-enthronement as a guide of life, a fountain of truth, an object of faith, a law written on the heart, will be recognised as the grandest and most beneficent achievement of that intelligence. It may well prove its slowest as its hardest

achievement, for it is proverbially more difficult to restore than to build up afresh. To renovate without destroying is of all functions that which requires the most delicate perceptions, the finest intuition, the most reverent and subtle penetration into the spirit of the original structure, as well as manipulation at once the most skilful and the most courageous. And the task imposed upon the thought and piety of the coming time is to perform this function on the faith and creed of centuries and nations—and to perform it amid the bewildering cries of interests and orders whom you will have rooted out of their comfortable and venerable nests; of age, which you will have disturbed in its most cherished prejudices; of affections, which you will have wounded in their tenderest points; of massive multitudes whom you will have disturbed in what they fancied were convictions and ideas; of worshippers whose idol only you will have overthrown, but who will cry out that you have desecrated and unshrined their God; of craftsmen of the Ephesian type, who "know that by this craft they have their wealth"; and of cynical and faithless statesmen whose unpaid policemen and detectives (the more efficient and more feared because unseen), and whose self-supporting penal settlement elsewhere (the more dreaded by malefactors because remotely placed, invisible, and undefined), you will be supposed to have abolished.

Another cognate question has been much discussed of late, and may be answered, we think, nearly in the same way. It is asked, not only, "Are we Christians?" but "Can a Christian life be lived out in modern days?" "Can we, and ought we to, regulate our personal and social life according to the precepts of Christ?" "Is Christianity, in very deed and as nakedly preached and ordinarily taught, applicable to modern society and extant civilisation?" "Is it possible, would it be permitted, can it be wise or right, to obey and act out the Christian rule of life in the British Isles and in 1873?"—No question can be more vital, none more urgent, none more

essential to our peace of conscience. None, we may add, is more sedulously and scandalously shirked. There is no courage and no sincerity or downrightness among us in this matter. We half say one thing and half believe another. We preach and profess what we do not think of practising; what we should be scouted and probably punished if we did practise; what in our hearts and our dim, fled-from thoughts we suspect it would be wrong to practise. Wherein lies the explanation of this demoralising and disreputable untruthfulness of spirit? Are the principles we profess mistaken? Is the rule of life we hold up as a guide erroneous, impracticable, or inapplicable to the altered conditions of the age; or is it our conduct that is cowardly, feeble, self-indulgent, and disloyal? Is it our standard that is wrong, or merely our actions that are culpable and rebellious? Is Christianity a code to be lived up to, or is it a delusion, a mockery, and a snare?

The specialities for the conduct of life prescribed by Christ's precepts and example, as gathered from the Gospels and the proceedings of his first disciples, which current civilisation does trammel and oppose, and which current thought does question and controvert, are five in number: non-resistance to violence, the duty of almsgiving, the impropriety of providence and forethought, the condemnation of riches, and the communism which was supposed to be inculcated, and which certainly was practised, by the earliest Christians. How far and under what modifications were these special precepts wise and sound at that time, and are they obligatory, permissible, or noxious now?

I. The precepts commanding non-resistance and submission to violence are too distinct and specific to allow us to pare them away to anything at all reconcilable with modern sentiments and practice, even by the most extreme use of the plea of oriental and hyperbolic language.* They

* "I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek,

go far beyond a prohibition of mere retaliation or blame of hasty resentment or vindictive memory. They distinctly command unresisting endurance of violence and wrong, whether directed against person or property. Now, can this precept be carried out, and would it be well that it should be?

The first consideration that occurs to us is that obedience to it has never been seriously attempted. The common sense or the common instinct of Christians, in all ages and in all lands, has quietly but peremptorily put it aside as not meant for use. Indeed, Christians have habitually fought from the earliest times just as savagely as Pagans. They have seldom dreamed even of confining themselves to self-defence—self-defence, indeed, being condemned just as decidedly as aggression. Nay, they have habitually fought in the name, and, as they firmly believed, in the cause of Christ, have gloried in the title of "good soldiers of Christ," have died with priestly blessing and absolution amid the rage of conflict, confident that their reward was sure, and that angels would bear them straightway to the bosom of the beloved Master whose orders they had so strangely set at naught. One sect, indeed, among Christians have professed to take this precept of Jesus literally—and what precept is to be so taken if this is not?—and have professed to obey it to the letter. But, in the first place, the Society of Friends never pretended to carry out more than one-half of it. They never went the length commanded in the

turn to him the other also. And if any man..... take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whomsoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." "Put up thy sword, for all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword." "Blessed are the Meek, for they shall inherit the Earth."

It is true that in one of the Evangelists, just before his arrest, Jesus is reported to have said to the twelve: "He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one." But the passage is so unintelligible, and so entirely out of keeping with the context, that it is almost certainly a case of misreporting, or misconception, or wholly unwarranted tradition. A few hours later Jesus said: "My kingdom is not of this world; else would my servants fight."

text, of *facilitating* assault and coercion. They never, we believe, denied themselves the luxury of passive resistance in its most resolute and ingenious devices. They did not return a blow; but they did not make the first so easy or so pleasant as to invite a second. And they have nearly died out. In the next place, they tried the experiment under circumstances which practically made non-resistance comparatively safe and easy—namely, under the ægis of police and law. It is but seldom that any of us now have actually to ward off a blow, or by force to resist an attempt at robbery, because, theoretically and potentially at least, the assailant knows and we know that the accredited guardians of order are there to do it for us. In fact, the daily routine of civilised life is organised on the assumption that the necessity for self-defence and resistance to evil is taken off our hands. Obedience to Christ's precept becomes wonderfully simplified—or rather it is dexterously evaded—when we have only to hand over our enemy to the nearest constable. We, in fact, do resist, and resist like the merest Pagan—only we resist by deputy—disobeying vicariously, that we may be in a condition to obey in person.

The truth is, that the whole of our criminal law and our police arrangements are based upon a systematic repudiation of the precepts in question; and the order of modern society and the security of modern life could not otherwise exist. In savage communities and in disordered times every man must succumb to violence or must defend himself. In such times obedience to the Christian precept would simply mean the extermination or enslavement of all Christians, the supremacy of the violent by the self-suppression of the gentle. In our days division of labour is in the ascendant; and we delegate the duties of resisting violence and evil to a professional class. If bad men abound—and where would be the meaning of Christian precepts and exhortations to a Christian life if they did not?—then, if the criminal class are not to prosper and to reign, police and the repressive and punitive law must exist and

act, must restrain and retribute. Who among us would for a moment advocate their abolition? Who that deems it right to maintain them can pretend that the Christian precept of non-resistance is obeyable in these days, or that he is endeavouring to obey it? His mind may be penetrated with the spirit of patience, humanity, and consideration for his fellow-men which led Jesus to utter that command; but the command itself he simply repudiates and evades.

There is still another view of the subject to be taken. The worst ill-service you can do to the violent is to show them that they may work their wicked will unpunished and unchecked by the natural instincts of humanity. It is to make them "masters of the situation," to encourage them by success and impunity, to enthrone them as monarchs of the world. It is to put goodness under the foot of evil, and so to drive back the progress of Humanity, to retard the coming of "the Kingdom of Heaven." It is, too, to harden the sinner in his wrong, the criminal in his crime, the brute in his brutality; to teach him to proceed in outrages and iniquities that pay so well; to make him heap up wrath against the day of wrath. Hundreds, who would have been stopped at the outset of their criminal career by prompt and timely resistance, are led on by the impunity which submission secures, till habits of crime are formed and recovery becomes hopeless. Non-resistance, then, becomes connivance and complicity in wrong.

The orthodox reply to these common-sense representations is well known, but has never been convincing. The wrongdoer, it is said, will be so amazed and melted by the calm acquiescence of his victim that his heart will be touched and his conscience awakened by the unexpected issue. He will be taken unawares, as it were—approached on an unguarded side; and thus be disarmed in place of being baffled, and converted instead of being defeated. But, we apprehend, this anticipation assumes one or two postulates fatal to its realisation, and somewhat contradictory. It assumes that resistance and

retaliation *are the rule*—else there would be nothing in the attitude of meek endurance to surprise the violent man into reflection and repentance. It implies, moreover, a susceptibility on the part of the violent which the habit of violence soon destroys. It seems, too, to pre-suppose a moral atmosphere that could only be created by a community of non-resisting Christians, or a world at least in which the wrong-doers were so comparatively few that they did not suffice to form a public opinion and class-sympathies of their own. It imagines the criminal, the oppressor, and the self-seeker, recoiling from the very facility and completeness of their success, and at the very moment when the prospect of its joys most radiantly dawns upon them. It expects them to be "touched by grace" just when the career of wrong looks most inviting and most full of promise. Such things may be—such things have been in isolated instances; but can they ever become normal? Can they be counted upon so as to form a safe or rational guide for conduct?

There is, however, one case in which the non-resistance doctrine is so obviously inapplicable that no one, we believe, has ever dreamed of practising it—namely, in the case of quarrels between nations. For one country to submit to outrage and wrong at the hands of another, when the means of resistance lay in its power, has never been held right or obligatory. The question has never seriously been brought under discussion; it being perfectly clear that the relative position of different nations from the earliest times even to our own having always been that of jealous rivalry, ceaseless controversy either smouldering or flagrant, and hostility latent or avowed, any people that habitually and notoriously submitted to violence would simply be over-run, enslaved, or trampled out. The doctrine of non-resistance would mean nothing but the destruction of the gentler and finer races, and the rampant tyranny of the stronger; the reign of violence, not of peace; the triumph of Satan, not of

Christ; in a word, the suicide of all meek and truly Christian peoples.

It is plain, then, that we have here one of three or four instances in which true Christianity must be held to require a disregard of its own precepts in favour of its own principles, in which Christ's exhortations are a guide to the spirit we must cherish, not to the conduct we must pursue. We must cultivate the temper which will effectually prevent us from being quick to resent or prone to retaliate, or severe to punish; but without abnegating those natural instincts which are sometimes our safest guides, or ceasing to maintain that firm attitude of self-protection which, under the governance of good feeling and good sense, is the best antagonist to the prevalence of violence upon earth.

II. *Alms-giving*.¹—Scarcely any precept in the Gospel is more distinct or reiterated than this. No duty has been more peremptorily insisted upon by the Church in all times and in all countries. It was one of the chief functions of the monastic institutions in the Middle Ages. It was made a legal obligation in the days which succeeded them. It is periodically inculcated from Protestant pulpits, and the Catholics are still more positive in enforcing it on all the faithful. Our own country swarms with proofs how literally and widely, generation after generation, the obligation has been acknowledged and fulfilled. The Reports of the Charity Commission, in countless volumes, bear testimony to the innumerable charities that exist, and explain a little what they have done. The recognition of the obligation of alms-giving is, to this day, nearly as prevalent and as influential as ever. It is of all Christian precepts that which is most strictly obeyed—

¹ "Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." "Sell that thou hast and give alms." "Let thine alms be in secret, and thy Father, who seeth thee in secret, himself shall reward thee openly." "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none." "Give alms of such things as ye have; and behold all things are clean unto you."

obedience to it being easier than to any other. A pious man and a tender-hearted woman do not feel comfortable or *good* unless they habitually give to beggars, or spend a given portion of their income in succouring the poor, or those who seem such.

Yet nothing can be more certain than that all this is very wrong and does infinite mischief. The more literally the precept ["give to him that asketh of thee"] is obeyed, the more harm does it do. No conclusion has been more distinctly or definitely proved than that nearly all charity, popularly so called—more especially all indiscriminate alms-giving—is simply and singularly noxious. It is noxious, most of all, to the objects of it—whom it fosters in all mean and unchristian vices, in idleness, self-indulgence, and falsehood. It is noxious, in the next place, to the deserving and industrious poor, from whom it diverts sympathy. It is noxious, also, to the entire community, among whom it creates and cherishes a class of most pernicious citizens. The form which charity has a tendency to assume in societies so complicated as all civilised societies are growing now, is such as to drain the practice of nearly all its incidental good, and aggravate its peculiar mischiefs. The alms-giver has not his kindly feelings called forth by personal intercourse with the poor; he *subscribes*, he does not *give*; and charitable endowments and bequests are ingenious contrivances for diffusing the most widespread pauperism. Paupers become sneaks and vagrants; and vagrants soon grow into criminals. It is needless to dwell on this; the consentaneous voice of modern benevolence and statesmanship alike is crying out against alms-giving as a mischief and a sin—as anything but philanthropy or charity—as a sentimental self-indulgence, and the very reverse of a Christian virtue, a distinct, and now nearly always a conscious, complicity in imposture, fraud, laziness, and sensuality. Everyone conversant with the question, all true lovers of their fellow-men, all earnest and practical labourers in the field of social

improvement, in the precise measure of their experience agree that, in all schemes and efforts for rectifying the terrible evils of our crowded civilisation, the most ubiquitous and insurmountable impediments arise out of the practice of indiscriminate alms-giving and systematic charity. One of the most pernicious and objectionable of our daily habits is in strict obedience to one of the clearest and most positive of Christian precepts.

Nor is it in England only that alms-giving is bad. It is bad everywhere; it is bad even in the East; it is very bad in Italy; it is worst of all perhaps in Spain. Everywhere it *creates* a special class of the worthless and the vicious, who soon become the criminal. *It is of its essence to do this.* The antagonism between the Christian precept and what ought to be the conduct of really Christian men is direct, complete, undeniable, and all but universal.

The mischief has arisen out of the time-honoured practice—a practice which surely now-a-days would be more honoured in the breach than the observance—of looking into the Gospel as a code of conduct instead of a well-spring of spiritual influence, and picking out texts to act by and to judge by, as a French judge opens chapter and verse of the Code Napoleon, instead of imbuing ourselves with "the same mind that was in Christ," and letting our behaviour afterwards flow freely therefrom. Christ directed us "to do good" to our fellow-men, especially to the poor and helpless among them. In our stupid literalism we have taken this as a command to do them all the harm we can. "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none"—read as an exhortation to use our abundance and our advantages to succour the needy and assist the less fortunate, is conceived in a beautiful and righteous spirit. But how, when the second coat has been provided to meet next year's exigencies at the cost of much difficult self-denial, and when the coat of the coatless man has been pawned for drink, and when the one which I give him is sure to follow its predecessor up the spout? Is thrift to be discouraged and sodden

sensuality to be fostered, in the name of a Christian duty? The solution of the difficulty is very plain. Jesus put the abstract principle in a parable or a concrete shape—as he always did: He commanded a benevolent frame of mind in the form of a precept to the simplest action to which that frame of mind would instinctively lead in circumstances when reflection would suggest nothing to control the impulse. Probably he never reflected on the danger of creating a whole tribe of begging impostors. Perhaps the danger did not exist in that day. In any case, what he really designed and desired was to produce a spirit of boundless compassion and love which should inspire his disciples with anxiety to do all the good possible, to render all the aid possible to those who were in distress or want; his aim was to elevate, not to degrade, to foster the Christian virtues, not the selfish vices; and the very texts that we read as enjoining alms-giving are really those which, interpreted aright, most distinctly prohibit it. Here it is not that a Christian life is not feasible in our days; it is only that it has become more difficult because less simple; and that in order to disentangle its dictates from its *dicta*, and to pierce to its inner significance, demands more intellectual effort and more intellectual freedom than we are prone to exercise. Here, if anywhere, it is “the letter that killeth, and the spirit that giveth life.” What we have to ask ourselves is, “What would Christ, with all the circumstances before him, have directed in these times?”

III. *Improvidence*.—There is scarcely any exhortation in the line of social morality more incessantly or more unanimously addressed to the people of this country than that which urges them to provide for the future, “to lay by for a rainy day”; to store up something of their daily earnings against the time when those earnings may fail or be interrupted. Assuredly there is no exhortation of which they stand more in need, nor one which they more habitually neglect. Manifestly there is no duty the sedulous

discharge of which more vitally concerns their future welfare and their present peace. It is their improvidence that condemns them to squalor, to indigence, to dependence, to wretched habitations, to unwholesome surroundings, and to all those moral evils and dangers which follow in the wake of these things. Few things can be more certain than that, if our working classes are ever to emerge from their present most unsatisfactory condition, if they are to become respectable citizens and true Christians, they must learn to save for to-morrow's needs, and to regard it as something very like a sin to leave to-morrow to take care of itself. To spend all their gains when those gains are ample, as they so habitually do, is obviously not only a folly, but something very like a fraud, inasmuch as it is wasting their own substance, in reliance that when it fails they will be fed out of the substance of others. It is the conduct so distinctly condemned in the case of the foolish virgins—with an aggravation. They do not forget to bring their oil; they deliberately waste it, knowing that they may say to their wiser neighbours, “Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out.” The workman who, in receipt of good wages, saves nothing out of those wages is *wilfully improvident, relying on the providence of others*; for what is the property from which charitable funds are derived and on which poor rates are levied but the accumulated savings of the provident and thoughtful? What is all invested wealth, indeed, but the steadily augmented economies of those who, generation after generation, have taken thought for the morrow? It is not too much to say that, if our artisan classes would for two generations—perhaps even for one—be as frugal and as hoarding as the French peasant is, and as the better portion of the Scotch and Swiss once were, the whole face of the country would be changed; they would be men of property instead of being Proletaires; they could live in comfortable dwellings in place of wretched hovels and crowded alleys; they might be men of comparative leisure instead of mere toilers all day and

every day, from childhood to old age; education would be as much within their reach as it is within the reach of their betters now; and the soil would be prepared in which all the Christian virtues and most civilised enjoyments could easily take root and flourish. With providence would come sobriety, with property would come independence, and all the facilities for a worthy and a happy life would grow up around them. In a word, providence, if not the very first duty of the social man, ranks very high among his duties, and is the *sine quâ non* of any decided and permanent improvement in either his social or his moral state. About this there can be no doubt. As to this there is no difference of opinion.

Yet it is not to be denied that this prime duty, this imperative obligation, this indispensable condition of human advancement, is not only deprecated, but actually denounced and prohibited, in that Sermon on the Mount which we are accustomed to look to as the embodiment of the Christian rule of life.¹

The words of Christ, and the exhortations of Christians, statesmen, economists, and moralists, are, then, directly at variance—and the latter are undeniably in the right. How is the difficulty to be met? How must the discrepancy be reconciled? Why not meet the question honestly and boldly,

* Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.....Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not better than they?.....And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore if God so clothe the grass of the field.....shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?.....Take, therefore, no thought, saying what shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed? But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.....Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.

and avow that Jesus was addressing hearers in a very different position and state of mind from the labourers and artisans of England—hearers who were wont to be not too careless, but too anxious, about the morrow; whose climate rendered comparatively little necessary, and yielded that little to very moderate toil; the conditions of whose civilisation were incomparably simpler than ours, and the obligations of whose labour less onerous.² It may well be, then, that the exhortations which were sound and appropriate to them are inapplicable to us. But we may probably, with perfect safety and with no irreverence, go a step further, and observe that Jesus, as was natural and customary, not only spoke with that Oriental picturesqueness of style which is almost inevitably exaggeration, but fixed his own thought and directed that of his hearers upon the one side and phase of truth with which he was at the moment dealing, to the exclusion of all qualifying considerations which must be taken into account as soon as we begin to frame a code of conduct or a system of action out of one isolated discourse addressed to one fraction of a great problem.³ Here, as elsewhere, the idea which lies at the root of the teaching is undeniably correct, for that idea deprecates and assails the inordinate worldliness which constituted one of the most insurmountable obstacles to the reception of Christ's doctrine. The error is ours, not Christ's—and consists in per-versely applying an exhortation addressed to a congregation among whom a particular quality of mind and temper was in excess to a congregation with whom it is most lamentably deficient. Had Jesus preached to English artisans, we may feel certain that

¹ See Renan, *Vie de Jesus*, ch. x., for a vivid delineation of the entirely different surroundings and features of the life of the Galilean fishermen and peasants to whom these exhortations were originally addressed.

² It must be remembered, too, that all these exhortations to lay up treasures in heaven, and not on earth, were delivered under the prevailing impression that the Kingdom of Heaven, where all things would be differently ordered, was close at hand.

he would have chosen a different theme, and used far other language. But that is by no means all that needs to be said. Not a word of Christ's rebuke to those who were eaten up by excessive care for the good things of the world, and were led thereby to neglect treasures immeasurably more precious, can be pleaded in justification of those who are so far from undervaluing these good things that they insist upon their instantaneous enjoyment and their immediate exhaustion; who lay by nothing for to-morrow only because, like the brutes that perish, they choose to eat up everything to-day; who, if they follow the letter of the law in laying up no treasure upon earth, utterly flout its spirit, inasmuch as they certainly lay up no treasure in heaven either. To eschew over-anxiety for future comfort and well-being, in order that we may be the freer for the work of righteousness, is the part of all true followers of Jesus; to "take no thought for the morrow" that we may indulge the more unrestrainedly in the indolence and sensualities of to-day, and to plead Gospel warrant for the sin, is to "wrest Scripture to our own destruction." It would be well that divines should make this more clear. The form which Christ's teaching would take were he to come on earth now, without the least real change in its essential spirit, would probably be: Take thought for to-morrow, and provide for its necessities, in order that, when to-morrow comes, you may be free enough from sordid wants and gnawing cares to have some moments to spare for the things that belong unto your peace.

IV. *Denunciation of Wealth.*—There is no line of conduct so emphatically condemned by Christ, and so eagerly pursued by Christians, as the pursuit of riches. There is no mistake about either fact. Throughout the Gospels riches are spoken of not only as a peril and temptation to the soul, but as something evil in themselves, something to be atoned for, something to be singled out for condemnation. The young man who has kept all the Commandments from his youth up, and asks what he must

do further to secure eternal life, is told to despoil himself of all his great possessions and give them to the poor. He is reluctant to do so, and Jesus thereupon observes that "a rich man shall hardly enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." According to Luke, he said: "Blessed are the poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God. Woe unto you that are rich, for you have received your consolation." "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth." In the parable of Dives and Lazarus, the rich man, without the faintest intimation that he had any other fault than wealth, is relegated to the place of torment; while the beggar, without the faintest intimation that he had any other merit but his indigence and his sores, is carried by angels into Abraham's bosom; and the startling and sole reason assigned for the award is that now it is the turn of Lazarus to be made comfortable. It is true that in one passage the harshness of Christ's denunciation is modified into the phrase, "How hard it is for them that *trust in uncertain riches* to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven"; and when his disciples are horrified at hearing that hard sentence about the needle's eye, and exclaim, "Who, then, can be saved?" he holds out a mysterious hope that in the infinite resources of the Most High some way of escape from the sweeping condemnation may be found. Still the prevailing tone and teaching of the Gospel cannot be gainsaid or veiled. It is to the effect that the poor are the more especial favourites of God; that wealth is a thing to be shunned, not to be sought; that it distinctly stands in the way of salvation, and will probably have to be atoned for hereafter by terrific compensation.

Yet in spite of this emphatic warning, riches have been the most general pursuit of Christians in all ages and among all classes, with rare exceptions in the monkish ages; among real and earnest, as well as among merely professing Christians; among the accredited teachers of the Gospel (to a considerable extent), as well as among the mere following flock of lay disciples. Nay more, the most really Christian nations have been, and still are, the most devoted

to the pursuit of gain ; the most rigidly and ostentatiously Christian sections of those nations—shall we say the Quakers and the Scotch?—have been among the steadiest and most quietly successful in the search. Nor do they even affect to fancy that they are wrong or disobedient in thus eagerly striving for that wealth which their Master so distinctly ordered them to eschew and dread ; they put aside or pass by his teaching with a sort of staring unconsciousness, as if it in no way concerned them ; with a curious unanimity they vote his exhortations obsolete, abstract, or inapplicable ; the most respectable of the religious world give one day to their Saviour and six days to their ledger ; the most pious banker, the purest liver, the most benevolent nobleman, never dreams of “despising riches,” or of casting from him his superfluous possessions as a snare to his feet and a peril to his soul. On the contrary, he is grateful to God for them ; he returns thanks for the favour which has so blessed his poor efforts to grow affluent ; he resolves that he will use his wealth for the glory of God.

Now, which is wrong—Christ in denouncing riches, or Christians in cherishing them? Our Master in exhorting us to shun them, or his disciples in seeking them so eagerly? Will modern society permit us to despise them? And would it be well for modern society that we should? The answer, if we dare to state it plainly, does not seem to be doubtful, or very recondite. We must imbue ourselves with the spirit of Christ's teaching as enduring and surviving, ever extant through all forms and all times ; and then we may safely ignore the letter as simply the accidental and temporary garment in which he clothed his meaning. This is probably the unperverted impulse of every true man, if he be a reflective man as well. Perhaps, indeed, the discrepancy between what Jesus preached, and that which every good and wise man would echo now, lies rather in the phraseology than in the essence of the doctrine. Jesus—living among the poor, cognisant of their “sacred patience” and their humble virtues, bent upon startling

his world out of the self-indulgent ease into which it had sunk, and profoundly impressed with the terrible influence which the abundance and the love of earthly possessions exercise in enervating the soul, incapacitating it for all high enterprise, all self-denying effort, all difficult achievement, seeing with a clearness which excluded for the moment all modifying considerations, the benumbing power of that fatal torpor and apathy which creeps over even nobler natures when this life is too luxurious and too joyful—saw that absolute renunciation would be easier and safer than the righteous use of wealth. We, on the other hand, who know—what was invisible in those simpler days—how necessary is the accumulation of capital to those great undertakings which carry on the progress and the civilisation of our complex modern communities—naturally and rightly regard the employment of affluence, and not its pursuit or its possession, as the fit subject of our moral judgments. It was in the grave of a rich disciple that Jesus was laid after the crucifixion ; and in the parable of the talents he praised and recompensed the men who had doubled their capital by honest trading, while condemning and despoiling the feckless and unprofitable idler. And the wise and right-minded of our day would denounce as unmercifully as Christ himself the rich man whose riches blind him to the far higher value of spiritual aims and intellectual enjoyments ; whose luxury and lavish expenditure make life difficult for all around him ; whose ostentation is an evil and a temptation to those who take him as their model ; to whom opulence is not a grand means, a solemn trust, and a grave responsibility, but merely a source of sensual indulgence and of vacant worthlessness ; or who passes his youth and manhood in adding house to house and field to field, wasting life without what alone renders life worth having. We see, too, perhaps more clearly than could be seen in earlier times, that poverty has its own special and terrible temptations and obstacles to virtue, as well as wealth ; and that with us, at least, not affluence

indeed, but assuredly competence, smooths the way, for the weaker brethren, to a crowd of Christian excellences. And finally, we recognise now, what was not known—perhaps was not the case—then, that though a rich man may use his wealth righteously and well, it is scarcely possible for him to get rid of it without doing mischief, and therefore doing wrong.

V. *Communism*.—It cannot be said that the Gospel anywhere distinctly preaches a community of goods, though it may be felt that the general tone of Christ's exhortations tends in that direction. But there can be no doubt that the earliest body of disciples, those who constituted what is termed the "Church of Jerusalem," did so interpret the teaching of their Master, and "had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, as every man had need." The same statement is repeated still more fully and distinctly in the fourth chapter of the Acts: "There was no one among them that lacked"; "lands and houses were sold, and the produce laid at the Apostles' feet for distribution"; "neither said any man that aught of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common." It is difficult to describe the sinking of all private property in a common fund in plainer language; and the strange story of Ananias and Sapphira, though the words are peculiar, can scarcely be held to invalidate the conclusion.

We can scarcely deny, then, that Communism is in some sort a corollary of Christ's teaching, though not a positively commanded part of Christianity. It has been held to be such by reforming sects and theorists in many ages, and various are the attempts recorded in history to reduce it to practice. The notion has been constantly reappearing during the last century, now in France, now in America. Many minds of no ordinary power have spoken in favour of the *conception*. Even Mr. J. S. Mill—who would have been a great Christian if he had not been a great thinker—has said that the idea at the root

of it was irrefragably sound, "that every man should *work* according to his capacities, and should *receive* according to his wants." Yet nothing is more certain than that every endeavour to carry out the scheme in practice has always failed, and, as the eminent man just named has admitted, must always fail, being constantly shipwrecked on the same rock. The characteristics of human nature forbid success. As men are constituted, if they receive according to their wants, they never will work according to their capacities. If they are fed and provided with all they need, they will, as a rule, work as little as they can. As regards masses of men, it is only their regard for self that will compel them to do their duty by the community. The institution of private property, the conviction that "if any man will not work, neither shall he eat," alone calls forth adequate exertions, alone controls indefinite multiplications, alone counteracts inveterate laziness, alone raises nations out of squalor and barbarism, alone lifts man above the condition of the beasts that perish. Where communism prevails, nine men out of every ten try to get as much and to do as little as they can; and the system, therefore, is found to be simply suicidal. It encounters, too, whenever attempted, another fatal difficulty. It is impossible for any external authority to determine what are each man's capacities, or each man's needs. Practically, therefore, communism is fatal to civilisation, fatal to order, fatal to freedom, fatal to progress; and if Christianity commands, favours, or indicates communism, Christianity is fatal to all these good things. But the dim idea, the sound nucleus, which lies latent in the communistic creed—the conception, namely, that all our possessions, as well as all our gifts, are to be held in trust for the general good of all—is eminently and distinctively Christian.

It will be answered that Christianity aims, and professes, so to remould men's natures, and to eliminate their vices, and to neutralise their selfishness, as to make a community of goods feasible, and not only compatible with, but conducive to, the

highest and surest advance of the species. But we are dealing with the practical question: "Is a Christian life liveable in our day?" And if communism be only possible and safe when all men are moulded in Christ's image and permeated by his spirit, and is noxious and fatal to the best interests of humanity under all other conditions, then, if a community of goods be implied in a Christian life, that life indisputably is not practicable now. It is found in actual fact, and has been found in all lands and in all times, that the institution of private property, with all the selfishness it involves and all the selfishness it fosters, is alone capable of drawing forth from our imperfect natures that strenuous and enduring exertion from which all progress springs. And this experience is the one sufficing, and perhaps the only unanswerable, justification of that often assailed and questioned institution.

To sum up the results of our inquiry. It may be safely pronounced that non-resistance, almsgiving, improvidence, and communism are not practicable in these days, and would be decidedly noxious, and therefore obviously wrong; while contempt of riches, if stopping short of that naked condemnation of them conveyed in the bald letter of the Gospel teaching, would be feasible enough. But the spirit and temper which Oriental imagination, hasty generalisation, unreflecting intelligence, unacquainted with the requirements of complex civilisation, and habitually hyperbolic phraseology, would naturally embody in those four exhortations, are as obligatory and as feasible as ever. The *thought*—the nucleus of the inner meaning—is sacred still and of enduring truth. It is only the casual and separable shell of words in which that thought was once conveyed that we must regard as having passed away, or possibly as never having been more than figuratively or exceptionally appropriate.

And we may use our freedom of penetrating to the true spirit and meaning of Christ's teaching through its casual or disguising letter, with the more boldness that

it is only this spirit as to which we can feel absolutely certain. Jesus spoke in Aramaic, while his sayings are recorded for us in Greek; and they must, therefore, have passed through the process of translation from one language into another; and, moreover, from one language into another whose genius is as singularly distinct as that of the German from that of the French. The record, too, it is pretty certain, did not take shape till at least half a century, or about a generation and a half, after the date of the events recorded—ample time for those events (whether facts or words) to have been moulded and modified, by the invariable practice of tradition, into the conceptions of the human intermediaries by whose agency they were handed down—a time so ample that this process of modification could not fail to have operated largely. And, finally, the Gospels themselves abound in indications that both the disciples who heard and repeated Christ's sayings, and the evangelists who recorded them in a foreign language, did not always conceive them rightly or comprehend them fully. Thus, what our English Testament practically contains is simply the form which the precepts of a great prophet and Master, orally delivered, have definitely assumed after having passed for a space of fifty years or more, by the process of oral tradition, through a succession of uncritical and imaginative minds, none of which grasped or understood them in their fulness or their pure simplicity; and after being subsequently exposed to the double risk of transfusion, first from a Semitic into an Aryan, and then from a classic into a Teutonic, tongue. It would seem, therefore, self-evident that this is a case in which reliance on special phrases and expressions, as well as on particular narrative details, must be singularly unsafe and unwise; and, as a fact, we find that even theologians who most loudly deprecate and repudiate this conclusion, when formalised in words, do practically recognise its truth, by putting their own gloss and interpretation on the bare language of Scripture wherever they find it necessary to do so; and that the

extent to which they use this liberty is merely a question of degree. Only then, we may fairly conclude—indeed, are forced to conclude—only that “mind which was in Christ,” that spirit, temper, enduring and inspiring character ; that life, in fine, which shone through all his actions and permeated all his sayings, and which was so vital, so essential, so omnipresent, and so unmistakeable, as to have survived through all the channels and processes of transmission we have described, and defied their perils, can safely be taken or followed as his real teaching. Doubts and disputes among Christians have been infinite as to the “doctrine” of Christ—as to the “particulars” of what he said and did. None, we believe, ever truly differed as to the tone and temper of his mind or of his teaching, as to the essential features of his character, as to what he meant by “ME” when he said “Follow me,” “Learn of *me*,” for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls.”

We may see now, too, how shallow and how groundless are the fallacies of those who jump to the conclusion that, in order to realise and carry out a truly Christian life, it is necessary to upset society, to abolish the hierarchy of ranks, and introduce a forced equality of position and possessions. The Gospel, rightly read, gives no countenance to those wild theories of ignorance, thoughtlessness, and envy. The New Testament contains many precepts as to our behaviour in those relations which spring out of that very inequality of conditions which Christianity, in the view of Communists, is supposed to discountenance. Some of the more distinctively Christian virtues, such as obedience and humility, would seem to be especially appropriate to a social organisation where rank, if not “caste,” holds sway. Certainly, as we have learned by experience, some of the most un-Christian vices, such as envy, lie deep at the root of the passion for equality, and have been seen to flourish with malignant strength where that passion has been most clamorous. Assuredly, too, we should say that a system of civilisation in

which masters and servants, rulers and subjects, rich and poor, the humble and the great, are recognised and established, appears to offer field and scope for a wider range and a greater variety of Christian excellencies than a community in which a dead level of uniformity should prevail. Nor can we conceive any single form or manifestation of “the mind which was in Christ” that may not thrive in fullest vitality in society as now constituted, and find ample work in purging its evils and developing its capabilities, without seeking to disturb its foundations. If Christianity cannot flourish under any phase of social and political organisation, if the seed of its more peculiar qualities can only germinate and fructify in soil enriched with the ruins of ancient orders and ancestral institutions, and flattened down by the hard grinding steam-roller of democracy, it can scarcely be the mighty or divine moral agency we have hitherto conceived it.

Our conclusion, then, is, that we are and may remain Christians, and that we can and ought to obey the Christian rule of life ; but that in order to do either we must deal with the kernel, not the husk ; we must penetrate to the true mind and temper of Jesus through the accretions which have overlaid it, the literalism which has disfigured it, and (be it said with all reverence) the Orientalism and the incompleteness, if not the imperfection, which mingled with and coloured it. Holding this, the utmost possible conquests of intelligence and learning are divested of their terrors. It is not with Christianity that science can ever be at issue ; only with theology calling itself Christian.

And now, having reached a time of life when most subjects are grave, and when some have grown very solemn—when the angry passions of the controversialist can find no breath or aliment in the thin, calm atmosphere of fading years ; when egotism has little left to gather round it ; and when few sentiments survive in pristine vividness but the love of nature and the reverence for

truth—I may be allowed one parting word, which, though personal, will scarcely be deemed obtrusive. I not only disclaim any position or feeling of antagonism to Christianity; I claim to have written this book on behalf, and in the cause, of the religion of Jesus, rightly understood. I entirely repudiate the pretensions of those whom I hold to have especially misconceived and obscured that religion, to be its exclusive or rightful representatives. I hold that thousands of the truest servants of our Lord are to be found among those who decline to wear what it is the fashion to pronounce his livery, with the grotesque and hideous facings of each successive age. I resent as an arrogant assumption the habitual practice of refusing the name of Christian to all who shrink away from or assail the errors and corruptions with which its official defenders have overlaid the faith of Christ. And I can find no words of adequate condemnation for the shallow insolence of men who are not ashamed to fling the name of “atheist” on all whose conceptions of the Deity are purer, loftier, more Christian, than their own. Those who dare to dogmatise about his nature or his purposes, prove by that very daring their hopeless incapacity even to grasp the skirts or comprehend the conditions of that mighty problem.¹ Even if the human intellect could reach the truth about him, human language would hardly be adequate to give expression to the transcendent

thought. Meanwhile, recognising and realising this with an unfeigned humbleness which yet has nothing disheartening in its spirit, my own conception—perhaps from early mental habit, perhaps from incurable and very conscious metaphysical inaptitude—approaches far nearer to the old current image of a personal God than to any of the sublimated substitutes of modern thought. Strauss's *Universon*, Comte's *Humanity*, even Mr. Arnold's *Stream of Tendency that Makes for Righteousness*, excite in me no enthusiasm, command from me no worship. I cannot pray to the *Immensities* and the *Eternities* of Carlyle. They proffer me no help; they vouchsafe no sympathy; they suggest no comfort. It may be that such a Personal God is a mere anthropomorphic creation. It may be—as philosophers with far finer instruments of thought than mine affirm—that the conception of such a being, duly analysed, is demonstrably a self-contradictory one. But at least in resting in it, I rest in something I almost seem to realise; at least I share the view which Jesus indisputably held of the Father whom he obeyed, communed with, and worshipped; at least I escape the indecent familiarity and the perilous rashness, stumbling now into the grotesque, now into the blasphemous, of the infallible creed-concocters who stand confidently ready with their two-foot rule to measure the Immeasurable, to define the Infinite, to describe in precise scholastic phraseology the nature of the Incomprehensible and the substance of the great Spirit of the universe.

I have but one word more to say—and that is an expression of unfeigned *amazement*—so strong as almost to throw into the shade every other sentiment, and increasing with every year of reflection, and every renewed perusal of the genuine words and life of Jesus—that, out of anything so simple, so beautiful, so just, so loving, and so grand, *could* have grown up or been extracted anything so marvellously unlike its original as the current creeds of Christendom; that so turbid a torrent *could* have flowed from so pure a fountain, and

* “It must be that the light divine,
That on your soul is pleased to shine,
Is other than what falls on mine:

“For you can fix and formalise
The Power on which you raise your eyes,
And trace him in his palace-skies.

“You can perceive and almost touch
His attributes, as such and such—
Almost familiar over much.

“You can his thoughts and ends display,
In fair historical array,
From Adam to the judgment-day.

“I cannot think him here or there—
I think him ever everywhere—
Unfading light, unstified air.”

—*The Two Theologies: Palm Leaves*,
by LORD HOUGHTON.

yet persist in claiming that fountain as its source; that any combination of human passion, perversity, and misconception *could* have reared such a superstructure upon such foundations. Out of the teaching of perhaps the most sternly anti-sacerdotal prophet who ever inaugurated a new religion, has been built up (among the Catholics and their feeble imitators here) about the most pretentious and oppressive priesthood that ever weighed down the enterprise and the energy of the human mind. Out of the life and words of a Master, whose every act and accent breathed love and mercy and confiding hope to the whole race of man, has been distilled (among Calvinists and their cognates) a creed of general damnation and of black despair. Christ set at naught "observances," and trampled upon those prescribed with a rudeness that bordered on contempt:—Christian worship, in its most prevailing form, has been made almost to *consist* in rites and ceremonies, in sacraments and feasts and fasts and periodic prayers. Christ preached personal righteousness, with its roots going deep down into the inner nature, as the one thing needful:—his accredited messengers and professed followers say No! purity and virtue are filthy rags; salvation is to be purchased only through vicarious merits and "imputed" holiness. Jesus taught his disciples to trust in and to worship a tender Father, long-suffering and plenteous in mercy:—those who speak in his name in these later days tell us rather of a relentless Judge, in whose picture, as they draw it, it is hard to recognise either

justice or compassion. In Christ's grand and simple creed, expressed in his plainest words, "eternal life" was the assured inheritance of those who loved God with all their hearts, who loved their neighbours as themselves, and who walked purely, humbly, and beneficently while on earth:—in their Christian sects and churches of to-day, in their recognised formularies and their elaborate creeds, all this is repudiated as infantine and obsolete; the official means and purchase-money of salvation are altogether changed; eternal life is reserved for those, and for those only, who accept or profess a string of metaphysical propositions conceived in a scholastic brain and put into scholastic phraseology; and, to crown the whole, a Hell is conceived so horrible as to make Heaven an impossibility,—for what must be the temper of the Elect Few who could taste an hour's felicity, while the immeasurable myriads of their dearest fellow-beings—their husbands and wives, their mothers, their children—were writhing in eternal torments within sight and hearing of *their* paradise? Theologians transmogrify the pure precepts and devotion of Jesus into a religion as nearly as possible their opposite, and then decree that, whoever will not adopt their travesty, "without doubt shall perish everlastingly." It is the old spectacle which so disturbed Jeremiah, reproduced in our own days:—"A wonderful and a horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule through their means; and the people love to have it so: *and what will be the end thereof?*"

THE CREED OF CHRISTENDOM

CHAPTER I.

INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

WHEN an Inquirer, brought up in the popular Theology of England, questions his teachers as to the foundations and evidence of the doctrines he has imbibed, he is referred at once to the Bible as the source and proof of all: "The Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants." The Bible, he is told, is a sacred book of supreme and unquestionable authority, being the production of writers directly inspired by God to teach us truth—being, in the ordinary phrase, *THE WORD OF GOD*. This view of the Bible he finds to be universal among all religious sects, and nearly all religious teachers; all at least of whom, in this country, he is likely to hear. This belief in the Inspiration of the Scriptures is, indeed, stated with some slight variations, by modern Divines; some affirming that every statement and word was immediately dictated from on high; these are the advocates of *Plenary or Verbal Inspiration*;—others holding merely that the Scriptural writers were divinely informed and authorised Teachers of truth and narrators of fact, thoroughly imbued with, and guided by, the Spirit of God, but that the words, the earthly form in which they clothed the ideas, were their own. These are the believers in the *essential Inspiration* of the Bible.

It is obvious that the above are only

two modes of stating the same doctrine—a doctrine incapable of being defined or expressed with philosophical precision, from our ignorance of the *modus operandi* of divine influences on the mind of man. Both propositions mean, if they have any distinct meaning at all, this affirmation:—that every statement of fact contained in the Scriptures is true, as being information communicated by the Holy Spirit—that every dogma of Religion, every idea of Duty, every conception of Deity, therein asserted, *came from God*, in the natural and unequivocal sense of that expression. That this *is* the acknowledged and accepted doctrine of Protestant Christendom at least is proved by the circumstance that all controversies among Christian sects turn upon the interpretation, not the authority, of the Scriptures; inasmuch, that we constantly hear disputants make use of this language: "Only show me such or such a doctrine in the Bible, and I am silenced."—It is proved, too, by the pains taken, the humiliating subterfuges so often resorted to, by men of science to show that their discoveries are not at variance with any text of Scripture;—pains and subterfuges now happily discarded by nearly all, as unworthy alike of the dignity of Science and the rights of controversy, and as no longer required amid the increasing enlightenment of the

age.—It is proved by the observation, so constantly forced upon us, of theologians who have been compelled to abandon the theory of Scriptural Inspiration or to modify it into a negation, still retaining, as tenaciously as ever, the consequences and corollaries of the doctrine; phrases which sprung out of it, and have no meaning apart from it; and deductions which could flow from it alone.—It is proved, moreover, by the indiscriminate and peremptory manner in which texts are habitually quoted from every part of the Bible, to enforce a precept, to settle a doctrine, or to silence an antagonist.—It is proved, finally, by the infinite efforts made by commentators and divines to explain discrepancies and reconcile contradictions which, independently of this doctrine, could have no importance or significance whatever.

This, accordingly, is the first doctrine for which our Inquirer demands evidence and proof. It does not occur to him to doubt the correctness of so prevalent a belief: he is only anxious to discover its *genesis* and its foundation. He immediately perceives that the Sacred Scriptures consists of two separate series of writings, wholly distinct in their character, chronology, and language—the one containing the sacred books of the Jews, the other those of the Christians. We will commence with the former.

Most of our readers who share the popular belief in the divine origin and authority of the Jewish Scriptures would probably be much perplexed when called upon to assign grounds to justify the conviction which they entertain from habit. All that they could discover may be classed under the following heads:—

I. That these books were received as sacred, authoritative, and inspired Writings by the Jews themselves.

II. That they repeatedly and habitually represent themselves as dictated by God, and containing His *ipsissima verba*.

III. That their contents proclaim their origin and parentage, as displaying a purer morality, a loftier religion, and

altogether a holier tone, than the unassisted, uninspired human faculties could, at that period, have attained.

IV. That the authority of the Writers, as directly commissioned from on High, was in many cases attested by miraculous powers, either of act or prophecy.

V. That Christ and His Apostles decided their sacred character, by referring to them, quoting them, and assuming or affirming them to be inspired.

Let us examine each of these grounds separately.

I. It is unquestionably true that the Jews received the Hebrew Canon, or what we call the Old Testament, as a collection of divinely-inspired writings, and that Christians, on their authority, have generally adopted the same belief.—Now, even if the Jews had held the same views of inspiration that now prevail, and attached the modern meaning to the word; even if they had known accurately who were the Authors of the sacred books, and on what authority such and such writings were admitted into the Canon, and such others rejected;—we do not see why their opinion should be regarded as a sufficient guide and basis for ours; especially when we remember that they rejected as an Impostor the very Prophet whom we conceive to have been inspired beyond all others. What rational or consistent ground can we assign for disregarding the decision of the Jews in the case of Jesus, and accepting it submissively in the case of Moses, David, and Isaiah?

But, on a closer examination, it is discovered that the Jews cannot tell us when, nor by whom, nor on what principle of selection, this collection of books was formed. All these questions are matters of pure conjecture, or of difficult and doubtful historic inference;—and the ablest critics agree only in the opinion that no safe opinion can be pronounced. One ancient Jewish legend attributes the formation of the Canon to the Great Synagogue, an imagined “company of Scribes,” *συναγωγή γραμματέων*,

presided over by Ezra.—Another legend, equally destitute of authority, relates that the collection already existed, but had become much corrupted, and that Ezra was inspired for the purpose of correcting and purifying it ;—that is, was inspired for the purpose of ascertaining, correcting, and affirming the inspiration of his Predecessors. A third legend mentions Nehemiah as the Author of the Canon. The opinion of De Wette—probably the first authority on these subjects—an opinion founded on minute historical and critical investigations, is, that the different portions of the Old Testament were collected or brought into their present form, at various periods, and that the whole body of it “came gradually into existence, and, as it were, of itself and by force of custom and public use, acquired a sort of sanction.” He conceives the Pentateuch to have been completed about the time of Josiah, the collection of Prophets soon after Nehemiah, and the devotional writings not till the age of the Maccabees.¹ His view of the grounds which led to the reception of the various books into the sacred Canon, is as follows:—“The writings attributed to Moses, David, and the Prophets were considered inspired on account of the personal character of their authors. But the other writings, which are in part anonymous, derive their title to inspiration sometimes from their contents and sometimes from the cloud of antiquity which rests on them. Some of the writings which were composed after the exile—such, for example, as the song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, and Daniel—were put on this list on account of the ancient authors to whom they were ascribed ; others—for example, Chronicles and Esther—on account of their contents ; and others again, as Ezra and Nehemiah, on account of the distinguished merit of their authors in restoring the Law and worship of God.”²

Again : the books of the Hebrew Canon were customarily classed among the Jews into three several divisions—the Books of the Law, the Prophets, and the other sacred writings, or Hagio-grapha, as they are termed—and it is especially worthy of remark that Philo, Josephus, and all the Jewish authorities *ascribed different degrees of inspiration to each class*, and moreover did not conceive such inspiration to be exclusively confined to the Canonical writers, but to be shared, though in a scantier degree, by others ;—Philo extending it even to the Greek translators of the Old Testament ; Josephus hinting that he was not wholly destitute of it himself ; and both maintaining that even in their day the gifts of prophecy and inspiration were not extinct, though limited to few.¹ The Talmudists held the same opinion ; and went so far as to say that a man might derive a certain kind or degree of inspiration from the study of the Law and the Prophets. In the Gospel of John xi. 51 we have an intimation that the High Priest had a kind of *ex officio* inspiration or prophetic power.—It seems clear, therefore, that the Jews, on whose authority we accept the Old Testament as *inspired*, attached a very different meaning to the word from that in which our Theologians employ it ; in their conception it approaches (except in the case of Moses) much more nearly to the divine *afflatus* which the Greeks attributed to their Poets.—“Between the Mosaic and the Prophetic Inspiration, the Jewish Church asserted such a difference as amounts to a diversity. . . . To Moses and to Moses alone—to Moses, in the recording, no less than in the receiving of the law—and to every part of the five books called the books of Moses, the Jewish Doctors of the generation before and coeval with the

¹ De Wette, i. 39-43. A marked confirmation of the idea of graduated inspiration is to be found in Numbers xii. 6-8. Maimonides (De Wette, ii. 361) distinguishes eleven degrees of inspiration, besides that which was granted to Moses. Abarbanel (De Wette, i. 14) makes a similar distinction.

¹ Introduction to the Critical Study of the Old Testament (by Parker), i. 26-35.

² De Wette, i. 40.

Apostles, assigned that unmodified and absolute *θεοπνευμία*, which our divines, in words at least, attribute to the Canon collectively."¹ The Samaritans, we know, carried this distinction so far that they received the Pentateuch alone as of divine authority, and did not believe the other books to be inspired at all.

It will, then, be readily conceded that the divine authority, or proper inspiration (using the word in our modern, plain, ordinary, theological sense), of a series of writings of which we know neither the date, nor the authors, nor the collectors, nor the principle of selection, cannot derive much support or probability from the mere opinion of the Jews;—especially when the same Jews did not confine the quality of inspiration to these writings exclusively;—when a large section of them ascribed this attribute to five books only out of thirty-nine;—and when they assigned to different portions of the collection different *degrees* of inspiration—an idea quite inconsistent with the modern one of infallibility.—“In infallibility there can be no degrees.”²

II. The second ground alleged for the popular belief in the Inspiration of the Jewish Scriptures appears to involve both a confusion of reasoning and a misconception of fact. These writings, I believe I am correct in stating, nowhere affirm their own inspiration, divine origin, or infallible authority. They frequently, indeed, use the expressions, “Thus saith Jehovah,” and “the Word of the Lord came to Moses,” &c., which seem to imply that in these instances they consider themselves as recording the very words of the Most High; but they do not declare that they are as a whole dictated by God, nor even that in these instances they are enabled to record His words with infallible accuracy. But even if these writings did contain the most solemn and explicit assertion of their own inspiration, that assertion ought not

to have, and in the eye of reason could not have, any weight whatever, till that inspiration is proved from independent sources—after which it becomes superfluous. It is simply the testimony¹ of a witness to himself—a testimony which the falsest witness can bear as well as the truest. To take for granted the attributes of a writer from his own declaration of those attributes is, one would imagine, too coarse and too obvious a logical blunder not to be abandoned as soon as it is stated in plain language. Yet, in the singular work which I have already quoted—singular and sadly remarkable, as displaying the strange inconsistencies into which a craven terror of heresy (or the imputation of it) can betray even the acutest thinkers—Coleridge says, *first* “that he cannot find any such claim (to supernatural inspiration) made by the writers in question, explicitly or by implication” (p. 16);—*secondly*, that where the passages asserting such a claim are supposed to be found, “the conclusion drawn from them involves obviously a *petitio principii*—namely, the supernatural dictation, word by word, of the book in which the assertion is found; for until this is established the utmost such a text can prove is the current belief of the Writer’s age and country” (p. 17);—and, *thirdly*, that, “whatever is referred by the sacred penman to a direct communication from God; and whenever it is recorded that the subject of the history *had asserted himself* to have received this or that command, information, or assurance, from a superhuman intelligence; or where the Writer, in his own person, and in the character of an historian, relates that the word of God came to Priest, Prophet, Chieftain, or other Individual; *I receive the same with full belief*, and admit its inappellable authority” (p. 27).—What is this, but to say, at p. 27, that he receives as “inappellable” that which, at p. 17, he

¹ Coleridge, “Confessions of an Enquiring Spirit,” p. 19.

² Coleridge, p. 18.

¹ “If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true” (*i.e.*, is not to be regarded), John vi. 31.

declares to involve an obvious *petitio principii*?—that any self-asserted infallibility—any distinct affirmation of divine communication or command, however improbable, contradictory, or revolting—made in any one of a collection of books, “the dates, selectors, and compilers of which” he avers to be “unknown, or recorded by known fabulists” (p. 18)—must be received as of supreme authority, without question, and without appeal?—What would such a reasoner as Coleridge think of such reasoning as this, on any other than a Biblical question?

III. The argument for the inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures derived from the character of their contents, will bear no examination. It is true that many parts of them contain views of Duty, of God, and of Man's relation to Him, which are among the purest and loftiest that the human intellect can grasp;—but it is no less true that other passages, at least as numerous and characteristic, depict feelings and opinions on these topics as low, meagre, and unworthy as ever took their rise in savage and uncultured minds. These passages, as is well known, have long been the opprobrium of orthodoxy and the despair of Theologians; and so far are they from being confirmatory of the doctrine of scriptural inspiration, that nothing but the inconsiderate and absolute reception of this doctrine has withheld men from regarding and representing them in their true light. The contents of the Hebrew Canon as a whole form the most fatal and convincing argument against inspiration as a whole. By the popular creed as it now stands, the nobler portions are compelled to bear the mighty burden of the lower and less worthy;—and often sink under their weight.

IV. The argument for the Inspiration of the Old Testament Writers, drawn from the supposed miraculous or prophetic powers conferred upon the writers, admits of a very brief refutation. In the *first* place, as we do not know who the Writers were, nor at what date

the books were written, we cannot possibly decide whether they were endowed with any such powers or not.—*Secondly*, as the only evidence we have for the reality of the miracles rests upon the divine authority, and consequent unfailing accuracy, of the books in which they are recorded, they cannot, without a violation of all principles of reasoning, be adduced to prove that authority and accuracy.—*Thirdly*, in those days, as is well known, superhuman powers were not supposed to be confined to the direct and infallible organs of the divine commands, nor necessarily to imply the possession of the delegated authority of God;—as we learn from the Magicians of Pharaoh, who could perform many, though not all, of the miracles of Moses;—from the case of Aaron, who, though miraculously gifted, and God's chosen High Priest, yet helped the Israelites to desert Jehovah and bow down before the Golden Calf;—and from the history of Balaam, who, though in daily communication with God and *specialy* inspired by Him, yet accepted a bribe from His enemies to curse His people, and pertinaciously endeavoured to perform his part of the contract.—And, *finally*, as the dogmatic or credential value of prophecy depends on our being able to ascertain the date at which it was uttered, and the precise events which it was intended to predict, and the impossibility of foreseeing such events by mere human sagacity, and, moreover, upon the original language in which the prophecy was uttered not having been altered by any subsequent recorder or transcriber to match the fulfilment more exactly;—and as in the case of the prophetic books of the Hebrew Canon (as will be seen in a subsequent chapter), great doubt rests upon almost all these points; and as, moreover, for one prediction which was justified, it is easy to point to two which were falsified, by the event;—the prophecies, even if occasionally fulfilled, can assuredly, in the present stage of our inquiry, afford us no adequate foundation

on which to build the inspiration of the *library* (for such it is) of which they form a part.

V. But the great majority of Christians would, if questioned, rest their belief in the Inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures upon the supposed sanction or affirmation of this view by Christ and his Apostles.—Now, as Coleridge has well argued in a passage already cited, until we know that the words of Christ conveying this doctrine have been faithfully recorded, so that we are actually in possession of his view—and that the apostolic writings conveying this doctrine were the production of inspired men—"the utmost such texts can prove is the current belief of the Writer's age and country concerning the character of the books then called the Scriptures."—The inspiration of the Old Testament, in this point of view, therefore, rests upon the inspiration of the New—a matter to be presently considered. But let us here ascertain what is the actual amount of divine authority attributed to the Old, by the writers of the New Testament.

It is unquestionable that these Scriptures are constantly referred to and quoted, by the Apostles and Evangelists, as authentic and veracious histories. It is unquestionable, also, that the prophetic writings were considered by them *to be prophecies*—to contain predictions of future events, and especially of events relating to Christ. They received them submissively; but misquoted, misunderstood, and misapplied them, as will hereafter be shown.—Further, however incorrectly we may believe the words of Christ to have been reported, his references to the Scriptures are too numerous, too consistent, and too probable, not to bring us to the conclusion that he quoted them as having, and deserving to have, unquestioned authority over the Jewish mind. On this point, however, the opinions of Christ, as recorded in the Gospel, present remarkable discrepancies, and even contradictions. On the one hand, we read of His saying, "Think not that I

am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till Heaven and Earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law till all be fulfilled."¹ He quotes the Decalogue as "from God"; and he says that "God spake to Moses."² It is true that he nowhere affirms the inspiration of the Scriptures, but he quotes the prophecies, and even is said to represent them as of prophesying of him.³ He quotes the Psalms controversially, to put down antagonists, and adds the remark, "the Scriptures cannot be broken."⁴ He is represented as declaring once positively, and once incidentally,⁵ that "Moses wrote of him."⁶

On the other hand, he contradicted Moses, and abrogated his ordinances in an authoritative and peremptory manner, which precludes the idea that he supposed himself dealing with the direct commands of God.⁷ This is done in many points specified in Matt. v. 34-44;—in the case of divorce, in the most positive and naked manner (Matt. v. 31, 32; xix. 8. Luke xvi. 18; Mark x. 4-12);—in the case of the woman taken in adultery, who would have been punished with a cruel death by the Mosaic law but whom Jesus dismissed with—"Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more" (John viii. 5-11);—

¹ Matt. v. 17, 18. Luke xvi. 17.

² Matt. xv. 4-6; xxii. 31. Mark vii. 9-13; xii. 26.

³ Matt. xv. 7; xxiv. 15. Luke iv. 17-21; xxiv. 27.

⁴ John x. 35.

⁵ John v. 46. Luke xxiv. 44.

⁶ It seems more than doubtful whether any passages in the Pentateuch can fairly be considered as having reference to Christ. But passing over this, if it shall appear that what we now call "the Books of Moses" were not written by Moses, it will follow, either that Christ referred to Mosaic writings, which we do not possess; or that, like the contemporary Jews and modern Christians, he erroneously ascribed to Moses books which Moses did not write.

⁷ "Ye have heard that it has been said of old time;"—"Moses, for the hardness of your hearts, suffered you to put away your wives," &c., &c.

in the case of clean and unclean meats, as to which the Mosaic law is rigorous in the extreme, but which Christ puts aside as trivial, affirming that unclean meats *cannot* defile a man, though Moses declared that it "made them abominable." (Matt. xv. 11; Mark vii. 15.) Christ even supersedes in the same manner one of the commands of the Decalogue—that as to the observance of the Sabbath, his views and teaching as to which no ingenuity can reconcile with the Mosaic law.¹

Finally, we have the assertion in Paul's Second Epistle to Timothy (iii. 16), which, though certainly translatable two ways,² either *affirms* the inspiration of the Hebrew Canon as a whole, or *assumes* the inspiration of certain portions of it.—On the whole, there can, I think, be little doubt that Christ and his Apostles received the Jewish Scriptures, as they then were, as sacred and authoritative. But till *their* divine authority is established, it is evident that this, the *fifth*, ground for believing the inspiration of the Old Testament, merges in the *first*, *i.e.*, the belief of the Jews.

So far, then, it appears that the only evidence for the Inspiration of the Hebrew Canon is the fact that the Jews believed in it.—But we know that they also believed in the Inspiration of other writings;—that *their* meaning of the word "Inspiration" differed essentially from that which now prevails;—that their theocratic polity had so interwoven

itself with all their ideas, and modified their whole mode of thinking, that almost every mental suggestion, and every act of power, was referred by them *directly* to a superhuman origin.¹—"If" (says Mr. Coleridge) "we take into account the habit, universal with the Hebrew Doctors, of referring all excellent or extraordinary things to the Great First Cause, without mention of the proximate and instrumental causes—a striking illustration of which may be obtained by comparing the narratives of the same event in the Psalms and the Historical Books;—and if we further reflect that the distinction of the Providential and the Miraculous did not enter into their forms of thinking—at all events not into their mode of conveying their thoughts;—the language of the Jews respecting the Hagiographa will be found to differ little, if at all, from that of religious persons among ourselves, when speaking of an author abounding in gifts, stirred up by the Holy Spirit, writing under the influence of special grace and the like."²—We know, moreover, that the Mahometans believe in the direct inspiration of the Koran as firmly as ever did the Hebrews in that of their sacred books; and that in matters of such mighty import the belief of a special nation can be no safe or adequate foundation for our own.—The result of this investigation, therefore, is, that the popular doctrine of the inspiration, divine origin, and consequent unimpeachable accuracy and infallible authority of the Old Testament Scriptures, *rests on no foundation whatever*—unless it shall subsequently appear that Christ and his Apostles affirmed it, and had means of knowing it and judging of it, superior to and independent of those possessed by the Jews of their time.

I have purposely abstained in this place from noticing those considerations which directly negative the doctrine in question; both because many of these will be more suitably introduced in

¹ See this whole question most ably treated in the notes to Norton, Genuineness of the Gospels, ii. § 7.

² The English, Dutch, and other versions render it, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for teaching," &c., &c. (an obviously incorrect rendering, unless it can be shown that *γραφή* is always used by Paul in reference to the Jewish Canon exclusively). The Vulgate, Luther, Calmet, the Spanish and Arabic versions, and most of the Fathers, translate it thus: "All divinely inspired writings are also profitable for teachings," &c. This is little more than a truism. But Paul probably meant, "Do not despise the Old Testament, because you have the Spirit; *since you know it was inspired*, you ought to be able to make it profitable," &c.

¹ De Wette, i. 39.

² Letters of Inspiration, p. 21.

subsequent chapters, and because, if a doctrine is shown to be without foundation or *unproved*, *disproof* is superfluous.—In conclusion, let us carefully note that this inquiry has related solely to the divine origin and infallible authority of the *Sacred Writings*, and is entirely distinct from the question as to the substantial truth of the narratives and the correctness of the doctrine they contain—a question to be decided by a different method of inquiry. Though wholly uninspired, they may transmit narratives, faithful in the main, of God's dealings with man, and may be records of a real and authentic revelation.—All we have yet made out is this: that the mere fact of finding any statement or dogma in the Hebrew Scriptures is no sufficient proof or adequate warranty that it came from God.

It is not easy to discover the grounds on which the popular belief in the inspiration, or divine origin, of the New Testament Canon, as a whole, is based. Probably, when analysed, they will be found to be the following.

I. That the Canonical Books were selected from the uncanonical or apocryphal by the early Christian Fathers, who must be supposed to have had ample means of judging; and that the inspiration of these writings is affirmed by them.

II. That it is natural to imagine that God, in sending into the World a Revelation intended for all times and all lands, should provide for its faithful record and transmission by inspiring the transmitters and recorders.

III. That the Apostles, whose unquestioned writings form a large portion of the Canon, distinctly affirm their own inspiration; and that this inspiration was distinctly promised them by Christ.

IV. That the Contents of the New Testament are their own credentials, and by their sublime tone and character, proclaim their superhuman origin.

V. That the inspiration of most of the writers may be considered as

attested by the miracles they wrought, or had the power of working.

I. The writings which compose the volume called by us the New Testament had assumed their present collective form, and were generally received throughout the Christian Churches, about the end of the second century. They were selected out of a number of others; but by whom they were selected, or what principle guided the selection, history leaves in doubt. We have reason to believe that in several instances writings were selected or rejected, not from a consideration of the external or traditional evidence of their genuineness or antiquity, but from the supposed heresy or orthodoxy of the doctrines they contained. We find, moreover, that the early Fathers disagreed among themselves in their estimate of the genuineness and authority of many of the books;¹ that some of them received books which we exclude, and excluded others which we admit;—while we have good reason to believe that some of the rejected writings, as the Gospel of the Hebrews, and that for the Egyptians, and the Epistles of Clement and Barnabas, have at least as much title to be placed in the sacred Canon as some already there—the Epistle to the Hebrews, the second of Peter, and that of Jude, for example.

It is true that several of the Christian Fathers who lived about the end of the second century, as Irenæus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria, distinctly affirm the inspiration of the Sacred Writings, as those writings were received, and as that word was understood, by them.² But we find that they were in

¹ See the celebrated account of the Canon given by Eusebius, where five of our epistles are "disputed";—the Apocalypse, which we receive, is by many considered "spurious"; and the Gospel of the Hebrews, which we reject, is stated to have been by many, especially of the Palestinian Christians, placed among the "acknowledged writings." De Wette, l. 76.

² De Wette, i. 63–66.

the habit of referring to and quoting indiscriminately the Apocryphal as well as the Canonical Scriptures. Instances of this kind occur in Clement of Rome (A.D. 100), Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 200), and, according to Jerome, in Ignatius also, who lived about A.D. 107.¹ Their testimony, therefore, if valid to prove the inspiration of the Canonical Scriptures, proves the inspiration of the rejected Scriptures likewise; and by necessary sequence, proves the error and incompetency of the compilers of the Canon, who rejected them. No one, however, well acquainted with the writings of the Fathers will be of opinion that their judgment in these matters, or in any matters, ought to guide our own.²

II. The second argument certainly carries with it, at first sight, an appearance of much weight; and is, we believe, with most minds, however unconsciously, the argument which (as Paley expresses it) "does the business." The idea of Gospel inspiration is received, not from any proof that *it is so*, but from an opinion, or feeling, that *it ought to be so*. The doctrine arose, not because it was provable, but because it was wanted. Divines can produce no stronger reason for believing in the inspiration of the Gospel narratives than their own opinion that it is not likely God should have left so important a series of facts to the ordinary chances of History. But on a little reflection it will be obvious that we have no ground whatever for presuming that God will act in this or in that manner under any given circumstances, beyond what previous analogies may furnish; and in this case no analogy exists. We cannot even form a probable guess *a priori* of His mode of operation;—but we find that generally, and indeed in all cases of which we have any certain knowledge,

He leaves things to the ordinary action of natural laws;—and if, therefore, it is "natural" to presume anything at all in this instance, that presumption should be that God did *not* inspire the New Testament writers, but left them to convey what they saw, heard, or believed, as their intellectual powers and moral qualities enabled them.

The Gospels, as professed records of Christ's deeds and words, will be allowed to form the most important portion of the New Testament Collection.—Now, the idea of God having inspired *four* different men to write a history of the same transactions—or rather of many different men having undertaken to write such a history, of whom God inspired *four* only to write correctly, leaving the others to their own unaided resources, and giving us no test by which to distinguish the inspired from the uninspired—certainly appears self-confuting and anything but "natural." If the accounts of the same transactions agree, where was the necessity for more than one? If they differ (as they notoriously do), it is certain that only one can be inspired;—and which is that one? In all other religions claiming a divine origin, this incongruity is avoided.

Further, the Gospels nowhere affirm, or even intimate, their own inspiration¹—a claim to credence, which, had they possessed it, they assuredly would not have failed to put forth. Luke, it is clear from his exordium, had no notion of his own inspiration, but founds his title to take his place among the annalists, and to be listened to as at least equally competent with any of his competitors, on his having been from the first cognisant of the transactions he was about to relate. Nor do the Apostolic writings bear any such testimony to them; nor could they well do so, having (with the exception of the Epistles of

¹ De Wette, p. 54, &c.

² See "Ancient Christianity," by Isaac Taylor, *passim*, for an exposition of what these Fathers could write and believe. See also "Literature and Dogma," by Matthew Arnold, p. 283, for a few curious specimens.

¹ Dr. Arnold, "Christian Life," &c., p. 487.—"I must acknowledge that the Scriptural narratives do not claim this inspiration for themselves." Coleridge, "Confessions," p. 16.—"I cannot find any such claim made by these writers, either explicitly or by implication."

John) been composed previous to them.

III. When we come to the consideration of the Apostolic writings, the case is different. There are, scattered through these, apparent claims to superhuman guidance and teaching, though not direct assertion of inspiration. It is, however, worthy of remark that none of these occur in the writings of any of the Apostles who were contemporary with Jesus, and who attended his ministry;—in whom, if in any, might inspiration be expected; to whom, if to any, was inspiration promised. It is true that we find in John¹ much dogmatic assertion of being the sole teacher of truth, and much denunciation of all who did not listen submissively to him; but neither in his epistles nor in those of Peter, James, nor Jude, do we find any claim to special knowledge of truth, or guarantee from error by direct spiritual aid. All assertions of inspiration are, we believe, confined to the epistles of Paul, and may be found in 1 Cor. ii. 10—16. Gal. i. 11, 12. 1 Thess. iv. 8. 1 Tim. ii. 7.

Now, on these passages we have to remark, *first*, that “having the Holy Spirit,” in the parlance of that day, by no means implied our modern idea of *inspiration*, or anything approaching to it; for Paul often affirms that it was given to many, nay, to most, of the believers, and in *different degrees*.² Moreover, it is probable that a man who believed he was inspired by God would have been more dogmatic and less argumentative. He would scarcely have run the risk of weakening his revelation by a presumptuous endeavour to prove it; still less by adducing in its behalf arguments which are often far from being irrefragable.³

Secondly. In two or three passages

¹ 1st Epistle iv. 6. “We are of God; he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”

² 1 Cor. xii. 8; and xiv., *passim*.

³ Gal. iii. 16, for example. See Arnold’s “Literature and Dogma,” p. 140.

he makes a marked distinction between what he delivers as his own opinion, and what he speaks by authority:—“The Lord says, not I;”—“I, not the Lord;”—“This I give by permission, not by commandment,” &c., &c. Hence Dr. Arnold infers,¹ that we are to consider Paul as speaking from inspiration wherever he does not warn us that he “speaks as a man.” But unfortunately for this argument the Apostle expressly declares himself to be “speaking by the word of the Lord,” in at least one case where he is manifestly and admittedly in error, viz., in 1 Thess. iv. 15;² of which we shall speak further in the following chapter.

Thirdly. The Apostles, *all* of whom are supposed to be alike inspired, differed among themselves, contradicted, depreciated, and “withstood” one another.³

Fourthly. As we showed before in the case of the Old Testament writers, the Apostles’ assertion of their own inspiration, even were it ten times more clear and explicit than it is, being *their testimony to themselves*, could have no weight or validity as evidence.

But, it will be urged, the Gospels record that Christ promised inspiration to his apostles.—In the first place, Paul was not included in this promise. In the next place, we have already seen that the divine origin of these books is a doctrine for which no ground can be shown; and their correctness, as records of Christ’s words, is still to be established. When, however, we shall have clearly made out that the words promising inspiration were really uttered by Christ, and meant what we interpret them to mean, we shall have brought ourselves into the singular and embarrassing position of maintaining *that Christ promised them that which in result they did not possess*; since there can be no degrees of inspiration, in the ordinary

¹ “Christian Course and Character,” pp. 488–9.

² See also 1 Cor. vii. 29. Philip. iv. 5.

³ Gal. ii. 11–14. 2 Peter iii. 16. Acts xv. 6–39. Compare Rom. iii., and Gal. ii. and iii., with James ii.

and dogmatic sense of the word; and since the Apostles clearly were not altogether inspired, inasmuch as they fell into mistakes,¹ disputed, and disagreed among themselves.

The only one of the New Testament writings which contains a clear affirmation of its own inspiration is the one which in all ages has been regarded as of the most doubtful authenticity—viz., the Apocalypse. It was rejected by many of the earliest Christian authorities. It is rejected by most of the ablest Biblical critics of to-day. Luther, in the preface to his translation inserted a protest against the inspiration of the Apocalypse, which protest he solemnly charged every one to prefix who chose to publish the translation. In this protest one of his chief grounds for the rejection is the suspicious fact that this writer alone blazons forth his own inspiration.

IV. The common impression seems to be that the contents of the New Testament are their own credentials—that their superhuman excellence attests their divine origin. This may be perfectly true in substance without affecting the present question; since it is evident that the excellence of particular passages, or even of the great mass of passages, in a book can prove nothing for the divine origin of the whole—unless it can be shown that all the portions of it are indissolubly connected. This or that portion of its contents may attest by its nature that this or that special portion came from God, but not that the book itself, including everything in it, had a divine source. A truth, or a doctrine, may be divinely revealed, but humanly recorded, or transmitted by tradition; and may be mixed up with other things that are erroneous; else the passages of scriptural truth contained in a modern

sermon would prove the whole sermon inspired and infallible.

V. The argument for Inspiration, drawn from the miraculous gifts of the alleged recipients of inspiration—a matter to which we shall refer when treating of miracles—is thus conclusively met by a recent author: "Shall we say that miracles are an evidence of inspiration in the person who performs them? And must we accept as infallible every combination of ideas which may exist in his mind? If we look at this question abstractedly, it is not easy to perceive the necessary connection between superhuman *power* and superhuman wisdom. . . . And when we look more closely to the fact, did not the minds of the Apostles retain some errors, long after they had been gifted with supernatural power? Did they not believe in demons occupying the bodies of men and swine? Did they not expect Christ to assume a worldly sway? Did not their Master strongly rebuke the moral notions and feelings of two of them, who were for calling down fire from Heaven on an offending village? It is often said that where a man's asseveration of his infallibility is combined with the support of miracles, his inspiration is satisfactorily proved; and this statement is made on the assumption that God would never confer supernatural power on one who could be guilty of a falsehood. What, then, are we to say respecting Judas and Peter, both of whom had been furnished with the gifts of miracle, and employed them during a mission planned by Christ, and of whom, nevertheless, one became the traitor of the garden, and the other uttered against his Lord three falsehoods in one hour?"¹

So far, then, our inquiry has brought us to this negative conclusion: that we

¹ The error of Paul about the approaching end of the world was shared by all the Apostles. James v. 8. 1 Peter iv. 7. 2 Peter iii. 12. 1 John ii. 18. Jude, verse 18.

[It may be added that there is no reason to believe that any of these epistles were the composition of Apostles.]

¹ "Rationale of Religious Inquiry," p. 30. Moreover the law of Moses directs that a false prophet, even though he work miracles in attestation, shall be put to death,—and St. Paul says that if "an angel from Heaven" preaches any doctrine that conflicts with *his*, "let him be accursed." Deut. xiii. Galatians i. 8.

can discover no ground for believing that the Scriptures—i.e., either the Hebrew or the Christian Canonical Writings—are *inspired*, taking that word in its ordinary acceptation—viz., that they “came from God;” were dictated or suggested by Him; were supernaturally preserved from error, both as to fact and doctrine; and must therefore be received in all their parts as authoritative and infallible. This conclusion is perfectly compatible with the belief that they *contain* a human record, and in substance a faithful record, of a divine revelation—a human history, and, in the main, a true history, of the dealings of God with man. But they have become to us, by this conclusion, *records, not revelations*;—histories to be investigated like other histories;—documents of which the date, the authorship, the genuineness, the accuracy of the text, are to be ascertained by the same principles of investigation as we apply to other documents. In a word, we are to examine them and regard them, not as the Mahometans regard the Koran, but as Niebuhr regarded Livy, and as Arnold regarded Thucydides—documents out of which the good, the true, the sound, is to be educed.

ADDENDUM.

The Author devotes a further chapter to the question of Inspiration, in which he

discusses the somewhat nebulous and obsolete speculations of Coleridge and Arnold; men who were incapable of subscribing the popular view, and yet loth to compendiously reject it. Mr. Greg points out that their evasiveness amounts to repudiation; but a repetition of his reasoning does not seem to be called for, and we may content ourselves with a simple reproduction of the concluding words of his second chapter, which are as true to-day as in 1850.

The present position of this question in the public mind of Christendom is singularly anomalous, fluctuating, and unsound. The doctrine of Biblical Inspiration still obtains general credence, as part and parcel of the popular theology; and is retained as a sort of tacit assumption, by the great mass of the religious world, though abandoned as untenable by their leading thinkers and learned men;—many of whom, however, retain it in name, while surrendering it in substance; and do not scruple, while admitting it to be an error, to continue the use of language justifiable only on the supposition of its truth. Nay, further;—with a deplorable and mischievous inconsistency, they abandon the doctrine, but retain the deductions and corollaries which flowed from it, and from it alone. They insist upon making the superstructure survive the foundation. They refuse to give up possession of the property, though the title by which they hold it has been proved and is admitted to be invalid.

CHAPTER II.

AUTHORSHIP AND AUTHORITY OF THE PENTATEUCH AND THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON GENERALLY

THE next comprehensive position which our Inquirer finds at the root of the popular theology, commanding a

tacit and almost unquestioned assent, is this:—That the Old Testament narratives contain an authentic and faithful

History of the actual dealings of God with man ;—that the events which they relate took place as therein related, and were recorded by well-informed and veracious writers ;—that wherever God is represented as visiting and speaking to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Samuel, and others, He did really so appear and communicate His will to them ;—that the ark, as built by Noah, was constructed under the detailed directions of the Architect of all Worlds ; that the Law, as contained in the Pentateuch, was delivered to Moses and written down by him under the immediate dictation of Jehovah, and the proceedings of the Israelites minutely and specifically directed by him ; that, in a word, the Old Testament is a literal and veracious history, not merely a national legend or tradition. This fundamental branch of the popular theology also includes the belief that the Books of Moses were written by Moses, the book of Joshua by Joshua, and so on ; and further that the Prophetical Books, and the predictions contained in Historical Books, are *bonâ fide Prophecies*—genuine oracles from the mouth of God, uttered through the medium of His servants, whom at various times He instructed to make known His will and institutions to His chosen People.

That this is the popular belief in which we are all brought up, and on the assumption of which the ordinary language of Divines and the whole tone of current religious literature proceeds, no one will entertain a doubt ; and that it has not been often broadly laid down or much defended is attributable to the circumstance, that, among Christians, it has rarely till of late been directly questioned or openly attacked. The proposition seems to have been assumed on the one side and conceded on the other, with equally inconsiderate ease.

Now, be it observed that if the Hebrew Narratives bore, on the face of them, an historical rather than a legendary character, and were in themselves probable, natural, and consistent, we might accept

them as substantially true without much extraneous testimony, on the ground of their antiquity alone. And if the conceptions of the Deity therein developed were pure, worthy, and consistent with what we learn of Him from reason and experience, we might not feel disposed to doubt the reality of the words and acts attributed to Him. But so far is this from being the case, that the narratives, eminently legendary in their tone, are full of the most astounding, improbable, and perplexing statements ; and the representations of God which the Books contain are often monstrous, and utterly at variance with the teachings of Nature and Christianity. Under these circumstances, we, of course, require some sufficient reason for acceding to such difficult propositions and receiving the Hebrew Narratives as authentic and veracious Histories ; and the only reason offered to us is *that the Jews believed them*.¹

But we remember that the Greeks believed the Legends in Herodotus, and the Romans the figments in Livy—and the Jews were at least as credulous and as nationally vain as either. We need, therefore, some better sponsors for our creed.

If, indeed, we were only required to accept the authority of the Jews for the belief that they sprung from Abraham, were captives in Egypt, received a com-

¹ Even this, however, must be taken *cum grano*. The Jews do not seem to have invariably accepted the historical narratives in the same precise and literal sense as we do. Josephus, or the traditions which were current among his countrymen, took strange liberties with the Mosaic accounts. There is a remarkable difference between his account of Abraham's dissimulation with regard to his wife, and the same translation in Genesis xx.—Moreover, he explains the passage of the Red Sea as a natural, not a miraculous event ; and many similar discrepancies might be mentioned. See De Wette, ii. 42.

Observe, also, the liberty which Ezekiel considered himself warranted in taking with the Mosaic doctrine that God will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children (c. xviii. *passim*), a liberty scarcely compatible with a belief on his part that such doctrine was, as alleged, divinely announced.

plete code of Laws and system of theocratic polity from Moses, conquered Canaan, and committed manifold follies, frauds, and cruelties in their national career—we might accede to the demand without much recalcitration. But we are called on to admit something very different from this. We are required to believe that Jehovah, the Ruler of all Worlds, the Pure, Spiritual, Supreme, Ineffable Creator of the Universe—Our Father who is in Heaven—so blundered in the creation of man, as to repent and grieve, and find it necessary to destroy His own work—selected one favoured people from the rest of His children—sanctioned fraud—commanded cruelty—contended, and for a while in vain, with the magic of other Gods—wrestled bodily with one patriarch—ate cakes and veal with another—sympathised with and shared in human passions—and manifested “scarcely one untainted moral excellence”;—and we are required to do this painful violence to our feelings and our understandings, simply because these coarse conceptions prevailed some thousand years ago among a People whose history, as written by themselves, is certainly not of a nature to inspire us with any extraordinary confidence in their virtues or their intellect. They were the conceptions prevalent among the Scribes and Pharisees, whom Jesus denounced as dishonourers of religion and corrupters of the Law, and who crucified Him for endeavouring to elevate them to a purer faith.

It is obvious, then, that we must seek for some other ground for accepting the earlier Scriptural narratives as genuine histories;—and we are met in our search by the assertion that the Books containing the statements which have staggered us, and the theism which has shocked us, were written by the great Law-giver of the Jews—by the very man whom God commissioned to liberate and organise His peculiar People. If indeed the Pentateuch was written by that same Moses whose doings it records, the case is materially altered;

—it is no longer a traditional or legendary narrative, but a history by an actor and a contemporary, that we have before us. Even this statement, however, were it made out, would not cast its ægis over the Book of *Genesis*, which records events from four to twenty-five centuries before the time of Moses.

But when we proceed to the investigation of this point, we discover, certainly much to our surprise, not only that there is no independent evidence for the assertion that Moses wrote the books which bear his name, but that we have nearly all the proof which the case admits of, that he did *not* write them,¹ and that they were not composed—at all events did not attain their present form—till some hundreds of years after his death. It is extremely difficult to lay the grounds of this proposition before general readers—especially English readers—in a form at once concise and clear; as they depend upon the results of a species of scientific criticism with which, though it proceeds on established and certain principles, very few in this country, even of our educated classes, are at all acquainted. In the conclusions arrived at by this scientific process, unlearned students must acquiesce as they do in those of Astronomy, or Philology, or Geology;—and all that can be done is to give them a very brief glimpse of the mode of inquiry adopted, and the kind of proof

¹ “After coming to these results,” says De Wette, ii. 160, “we find no ground and no evidence to show that the books of the Pentateuch were composed by Moses. Some consider him their author merely from traditional custom, because the Jews were of their opinion; though it is not certain that the more ancient Jews shared it; for the expressions ‘the Book of the Law of Moses,’ ‘the Book of the Law of Jehovah by the hand of Moses,’ only designate him as the author or mediator of the *Law*, not as the author of the *Book*.—The Law is ascribed to the ‘Prophets’ in 2 Kings xvii. 13, and in Ezra ix. 11. The opinion that Moses composed these books is not only opposed by all the signs of a later date which occur in the Book itself, but also by the entire analogy of the history of the Hebrew literature and language.”

adduced: this we shall do as concisely and as intelligibly as we can; and we will endeavour to state nothing which is not considered as established by men of the highest eminence in this very difficult branch of intellectual research.

The discovery in the Temple of the Book of the Law, in the reign of King Josiah, about B.C. 624, as related in 2 Kings xxii., is the first certain trace of the existence of the Pentateuch in its present form.¹ That if this, the Book of the Law of Moses, existed before this time, it was generally unknown, or had been quite forgotten, appears from the extraordinary sensation the discovery excited, and from the sudden and tremendous reformation immediately commenced by the pious and alarmed Monarch, with a view of carrying into effect the ordinances of this law.—Now we find that when the Temple was built and consecrated by Solomon, and the Ark placed therein (about B.C. 1000), this “Book of the Law” *was not there*—for it is said (1 Kings viii. 9), “There was nothing in the Ark save the two Tables of Stone which Moses put there at Horeb.”² Yet on turning to Deuteronomy xxxi. 24–26, we are told that when Moses had made an end of writing the words of the Law in a book, he said to the Levites, “Take this Book of the Law and put it in the side of the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there to witness against you,” &c., &c.

This “Book of the Law” which was found in the Temple in the reign of Josiah (B.C. 624), which *was not there* in the time of Solomon (B.C. 1000), and which is stated to have been written and placed in the Ark by Moses (B.C. 1450), is almost certainly the one ever afterwards referred to and received as the “Law of God,” the “Law of Moses,” and quoted as such by Ezra and Nehe-

miah.¹ And the only evidence we have that Moses was the author of the books found by Josiah appears to be the passage in Deuteronomy xxxi., above cited.

But how did it happen that a book of such immeasurable value to the Israelites, on their obedience to which depended all their temporal blessings, which was placed in the sanctuary by Moses, and found there by Josiah, was not there in the time of Solomon?—Must it not have been found there by Solomon, if really placed there by Moses? for Solomon was as anxious as Josiah to honour Jehovah and enforce His Law.² In a word, have we any reason for believing that Moses really wrote the Book of Deuteronomy, and placed it in the Ark, as stated therein?—Critical science answers in the negative.

In the first place, Hebrew scholars assure us that the style and language of the Book forbids us to entertain the idea that it was written either by Moses, or near his time; as they resemble too closely those of the later writers of the Old Testament to admit the supposition that the former belonged to the 15th, and the latter to the 5th century before Christ. To imagine that the Hebrew language underwent no change, or a very slight one, during a period of two thousand years—in which the nation underwent vast political, social, and moral changes, with a very great admixture of foreign blood—is an idea antecedently improbable, and is contradicted by all analogy. The same remark applies, though with somewhat

¹ Subsequent references seem especially to refer to Deuteronomy.

² Conclusive evidence on this point may, we think, be gathered from Deut. xxxi. 10, where it is commanded that the law shall be publicly read every seventh year to the people assembled at the Feast of Tabernacles; and from xvii. 18, where it is ordained that each king on his accession shall write out a copy of the Law. It is impossible to believe that this command, had it existed, would have been neglected by all the pious and good kings who sat on the throne of Palestine. It is clear that they had never heard of such a command.

¹ De Wette, ii. 153.

² The same positive statement is repeated 2 Chron. v. 10.

less force, to the other four books of the Pentateuch.¹

Secondly. It is certain that Moses cannot have been the author of the *whole* of the Book of Deuteronomy, because it records his own death, c. xxxiv. It is obvious also that the last chapter must have been written, not only after the death of Moses, but a long period after, as appears from verse 10. "And there arose not another prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face." Now, there are no critical signs of style or language which would justify the assumption that the last chapter was the production of a different pen, or a later age, than the rest of the Book.

Thirdly. There are several passages scattered through the book which speak *in the past tense* of events which occurred after the Israelites obtained possession of the land of Canaan, and which must therefore have been written subsequently—probably long subsequently—to that period. For example: "The Horims also dwelt in Seir beforetime, but the children of Esau succeeded them, when they had destroyed them from before them, and dwelt in their stead; *as Israel did unto the land of his possession, which the Lord gave unto them.*" Deut. ii. 12. Many other anachronisms occur, as throughout c. iii., especially verse 14; xix. 14; xxiv. 1-3; ii. 20-23.

Finally, as we have seen, at xxxi. 26, is a command to place the book of the Law in the Ark, and a statement that it was so placed. Now as it was not in the Ark at the time when the Temple was consecrated, this passage must have been written subsequent to that event. See also verses 9-13.

Now either all these passages must have been subsequent interpolations, or they decide the date of the whole book. But they are too closely interwoven, and too harmoniously coalesce, with the rest to justify the former supposition. We are therefore driven to adopt the conclusion of De Wette and other

critics, that the Book of Deuteronomy was written about the time of Josiah, shortly before, and with a view to, the discovery of the Pentateuch in the Temple.¹

With regard to the other four books attributed to Moses, scientific investigation has succeeded in making it quite clear, not only that they were written long after his time, but that they are a compilation from, or rather an imperfect fusion of, two principal original documents, easily distinguishable throughout by those accustomed to this species of research, and appearing to have been a sort of legendary or traditionary histories, current among the earlier Hebrews. These two documents (or classes of documents) are called the *Elohistic*, and *Jehovistic*, from the different Hebrew names they employ in speaking of the Supreme Being;—the one using habitually the word ELOHIM, which our translation renders God, but which, being plural in the original, would be more correctly rendered *The Gods*;—the other using the word JEHOVAH, or JEHOVAH ELOHIM, *The God of Gods*—rendered in our translation THE LORD GOD.²

The existence of two such documents, or of two distinct and often conflicting narratives, running side by side, will be obvious on a very cursory perusal of the Pentateuch, more especially of the Book of Genesis; and the constant recurrence of these duplicate and discrepant statements renders it astonishing that the books in question could ever have been regarded as one original history, proceeding from one pen. At the very commencement we have separate and varying accounts of the Creation:—the *Elohistic one*, extending from Gen. i.-ii. 3, magnificent, simple, and sublime, describing the form of the animate and

¹ It is worthy of remark that the Book of Joshua (x. 13) quotes the Book of Jashar, which must have been written as late as the time of David (2 Samuel i. 18). See De Wette, ii. 187.

² There are, however, other distinctive marks: De Wette, ii. 77. Bauer, *Theol. des Alt. Test.* c. ii. § 1.

¹ De Wette, ii. 161.

inanimate world by the fiat of the Almighty, and the making of man, male and female, in the image of God—but preserving a total silence respecting the serpent, the apple, and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden;—the other, or Jehovistic, extending from Gen. ii. 4 to iii. 24, giving a different account of the formation of man and woman—describing the Garden of Eden with its four rivers, one flowing into the Persian Gulf and another surrounding Ethiopia¹—narrating the temptation, the sin, and the curse, and adding a number of minute and puerile details, bespeaking the conceptions of a rude and early age, such as God teaching Adam and Eve to make coats of skin in lieu of the garments of fig leaves they had contrived for themselves.

The next comparison of the two documents presents discrepancies almost equally great. The document Elohim, Gen. v. 1-32, gives simply the Genealogy from Adam to Noah, giving SETH as the name of Adam's first-born son;—whereas the document Jehovah, Gen. iv. 1-26, gives CAIN as the name of Adam's first-born and SETH as that of his last.² Shortly after we have two slightly-varying accounts³ of the flood; one being contained in vi. 9-22; vii. 11-16, 18-22;

¹ Cush, or "the land of swarthy men."

² "There is," says Theodore Parker, "a striking similarity between the names of the alleged descendants of Adam and Enos (according to the Elohim document, the grandson of Adam). It is to be remembered that both names signify *Man*."

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| I. | II. |
| 1. Adam. | 1. Enos. |
| 2. Cain. | 2. Cainan. |
| 3. Enoch. | 3. Mahalaleel. |
| 4. Irad. | 4. Jared. |
| 5. Mehujael. | 5. Enoch. |
| 6. Methusael. | 6. Methusaleh. |
| 7. Lamech (Gen. iv. 17-19). | 7. Lamech (Gen. v. 9-25)." |

The reader may draw his own inferences from this, or see those of Buttmann, in his "Mythologus," i. c. vii. p. 171. See also on this matter, Kenrick on "Primeval History," p. 59.

³ One account affirms that *seven* specimens of clean beasts went into the ark; the other that only *two* so entered.

viii. 1-19; the other comprising vi. 1-8; vii. 7-10, 17, 23.

We will specify only one more instance of the same event twice related with obvious and irreconcilable discrepancies, viz., the seizure of Sarah in consequence of Abraham's timid falsehood. The document Elohim (Gen. xx.) places the occurrence in Gerar and makes Abimelech the offender—the document Jehovah (xii. 10-19) places it in Egypt, and makes Pharaoh the offender; whilst the same document again (xxvi. 1-11) narrates the same occurrence, representing Abimelech as the offender and Gerar as the locality, but changing the persons of the deceivers from Abraham and Sarah to Isaac and Rebekah.

Examples of this kind might be multiplied without end; which clearly prove the existence of at least two historical documents blended, or rather bound together, in the Pentateuch. We will now proceed to point out a few of the passages and considerations which negative the idea of *either* of them having been composed in the age or by the hand of Moses.¹

The Elohim document must have been written *after the expulsion of the Canaanites* and the settlement of the Israelites in the Promised Land, as appears from the following passages (*inter alia*),—

"Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things . . . that the land vomit not you out also, *as it vomited forth the nations which were before you*" (Lev. xviii. 24, 27, 28).

"For I was stolen away *out of the land of the Hebrews*" (Gen. xl. 15). Palestine would not be called the land

¹ The formula, "unto this day," is frequently found under circumstances indicating that the writer lived long subsequent to the events he relates (Gen. xix. 38; xxvi. 33; xxxiii. 32). We find frequent archaeological explanations, as Ex. xvi. 36: "Now an omer (an ancient measure) is the tenth part of an ephah" (a modern measure).—Explanations of old names, and additions of the modern ones which had superseded them, repeatedly occur, as at Gen. xiv. 2, 7, 8, 17; xxiii. 2; xxxv. 19.

of the Hebrews till after the settlement of the Hebrews therein.

"And Sarah died in Kirjatharba; *the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan*" (Gen. xxiii. 2). "And Rachel died and was buried in the way to Ephrath, *which is Bethlehem*" (xxxv. 19). "And Jacob came unto the city of Arba, *which is Hebron*" (xxxv. 27). These passages indicate a time subsequent to the erection of the Israelitish cities.

The document must have been written *in the time of the Kings*; for it says, Gen. xxxvi. 31, "These are the Kings that reigned in the land of Edom, *before there reigned any King over the children of Israel.*" Yet it must have been written *before the end of the reign of David*, since Edom, which David subdued, is represented in ch. xxxvi. as still independent. The conclusion, therefore, which critical Science has drawn from these and other points of evidence is, that the Elohim documents were composed in the time of Saul, or about B.C. 1055, four hundred years after Moses.

The Jehovistic documents are considered to have had a still later origin, and to date from about the reign of Solomon, B.C. 1000. For they were written *after the expulsion of the Canaanites*, as is shown from Gen. xii. 6 and xiii. 7: "The Canaanite *was then in the land.*" "The Canaanite and Perizzite *dwelt then in the land.*" They appear to have been written *after the time of the Judges*; since the exploits of Jair the Gileadite, one of the Judges (x. 4), are mentioned in Numb. xxxii. 41; *after Saul's victory over Agag*, King of the Amalekites, who is mentioned there—"and his King shall be higher than Agag" (Numb. xxiv. 7);—and if, as De Wette thinks, the Temple of Jerusalem is signified by the two expressions (Exod. xxiii. 19; xv. 13), "The House of Jehovah," and the "habitation of thy holiness,"—they must have been composed after the erection of that edifice. This, however, we consider as inconclusive. On the other hand, it is thought that they must

have been written *before the time of Hezekiah*, because (in Numb. xxi. 6-9) they record the wonders wrought by the Brazen Serpent, which that King destroyed as a provocative to Idolatry (2 Kings xviii. 4). We are aware that many persons endeavour to avoid these conclusions by assuming that the passages in question are later interpolations. But—not to comment upon the wide door which would thus be opened to other and less scrupulous interpreters—this assumption is entirely unwarranted by evidence, and proceeds on the previous assumption—equally destitute of proof—that the Books in question *were* written in the time of Moses—the very point under discussion. To prove the Books to be written by Moses by rejecting as interpolations all passages which show that they could not have been written by him—is a very clerical, but a very inadmissible, mode of reasoning.

It results from this inquiry that the Pentateuch assumed its present form about the reign of King Josiah, B.C. 624, eight hundred years after Moses;—that the Book of Deuteronomy was probably composed about the same date;—that the other four books, or rather the separate documents of which they consist, were written between the time of Samuel and Solomon, or from four to five hundred years after Moses;—that they record the traditions respecting the early history of the Israelites and the Law delivered by Moses then current among the Priesthood and the people, with such material additions as it seemed good to the Priests of that period to introduce;—and that there is not the slightest reason to conclude that the historical narratives they contain were anything more than a collection of the national traditions then in vogue.¹

[The concluding portion of the chapter deals with the "reconcilers of science and theology," such as Whewell and Buckland, but their speculations are now

¹ De Wette and other critics are of opinion that both the Elohist and Jehovistic authors

quite obsolete, and we may content ourselves with listening to the author's parting words:—]

It will not do for Geologists and Astronomers, who wish to retain some rags of orthodoxy, however soiled and torn, to argue, as most do, 'that the Bible was not intended as a revelation of physical science, but only of moral and religious truth.' This does not meet the difficulty; for the Bible does not merely use the common language, and so *assume* the common errors, on these points—it gives a distinct account of the Creation, in the same style, in the same narrative, in the same book, in which it narrates the Fall of Man, the Deluge, the Revelation to Abraham, the history of Jacob and Joseph. The writer evidently had no conception that when he related the Creation of the Earth, the Sea, and the Sun he was inventing or perpetuating a monstrous error; and that when he related the Fall he was revealing a mighty and mysterious truth;

and when he narrated the promise to Abraham he was recording a wondrous prophecy. The Bible professes to *give information* on all these points alike; and we have precisely the same Scriptural ground for believing that God first made the Earth and then the Sun for the especial benefit of the Earth; that the globe was submerged by rain which lasted forty days; and that everything was destroyed except the animals which Noah packed into his Ark—as we have for believing that Adam and Eve were driven out of Paradise for a transgression; that God promised Abraham to redeem the world through his progeny; and that Jacob and Moses were the subjects of the divine communications recorded as being made to them. All the statements are made in the same affirmative style and on the same authority. The Bible equally professes to teach us *fact* on all these matters. There is no escape by any quibble from the grasp of this conclusion.

CHAPTER III

THE PROPHECIES

A PROPHECY, in the ordinary acceptance of the term, signifies a prediction of future events which could not have been foreseen by human sagacity, and the knowledge of which was supernaturally communicated to the prophet. It is

of the Pentateuch had access to more ancient documents extant in their times, and think it probable that some of these materials may have been Mosaic (De Wette, ii. 139).

[Kuenen places the Jehovistic document about 800 B.C. and the Elohist about 750 B.C. The four earlier books of the Hexateuch assumed their present form about 450 B.C., and Deuteronomy, as Mr. Greg states, about 600 B.C.]

clear, therefore, that in order to establish the claim of any anticipatory statement, promise, or denunciation to the rank and title of a prophecy, four points must be ascertained with *precision*—viz., what the event was to which the alleged prediction was intended to refer; that the prediction was uttered *in specific, not vague, language* before the event; that the event took place specifically, not loosely, as predicted; and that it could not have been foreseen by human sagacity.

Now, there is no portion of the sacred

writings over which hangs a veil of such dim obscurity, or regarding the meaning of which such hopeless discrepancies have prevailed among Christian divines, as the Prophetical Books of the Hebrew Canon. The difficulties to which the English reader is exposed by the extreme defects of the received translation, its confused order, and erroneous divisions are at present nearly insuperable. No chronology is observed; the earlier and the later, the genuine and the spurious are mixed together; and sometimes the prophecies of two individuals of different epochs are given us under the same name. In the case of some of the more important of them we are in doubt as to the date, the author, and the interpretation; and on the question whether the predictions related exclusively to Jewish or to general history, to Cyrus or to Jesus, to Zerubbabel or to Christ, to Antiochus Epiphanes, to Titus or to Napoleon; to events long past, or to events still in the remote future—the most conflicting opinions have been held with equal confidence by men of equal learning. It would carry us too far, and prove too unprofitable an occupation, to enumerate these contradictory interpretations; we shall in preference content ourselves with a brief statement of some considerations which will show how far removed we are on this subject from the possession of that clear certainty, or even that moderate verisimilitude of knowledge, on which alone any reasonings, such as have been based on Hebrew prophecy, can securely rest. There is no department of theology in which divines have so universally assumed their conclusions and modified their premises to suit them as in this.

I. In the first place, it is not unstructive to remind ourselves of a few of the indications scattered throughout the Scriptures of what the conduct and state of mind of the Prophets often were. They seem, like the utterers of Pagan oracles, to have been worked up before giving forth their prophecies into a species of religious frenzy, produced

or aided by various means, especially by music and dancing.¹ Philo says, "The mark of true prophecy is the rapture of its utterance; in order to attain divine wisdom the soul must go out of itself, and become drunk with divine frenzy."² The same word in Hebrew (and Plato thought in Greek also) signifies "to prophesy" and "to be mad";³ and even among themselves the prophets were often regarded as madmen⁴—an idea to which their frequent habit of going about naked⁵ and the performance occasionally of still more disgusting ceremonies greatly contributed. That many of them were splendid poets and noble-minded men there can be no doubt; but we see in conduct like this little earnest of sobriety or divine inspiration, and far too much that reminds us of the fanatics of eastern countries and of ancient times.

II. Many, probably most, of the so-called prophecies were not intended as predictions in the proper meaning of the word, but were simply promises of prosperity or denunciations of vengeance *contingent* upon certain lines of conduct. The principle of the Hebrew theocracy was that of temporal rewards or punishments consequent upon obedience to, or deviation from, the divine ordinances; and in the great proportion of cases the prophetic language seems to have been nothing more than a reminder or fresh renunciation of the principle. This is clearly shown by the circumstances that several of the prophecies, though originally given, not in the contingent, but in the positive form, were *rescinded*, or contradicted by later prophetical denunciations, as in the case of Eli, David, Hezekiah, and Jonah. The rescinding of prophecy in 1 Sam. ii. 30 is very remarkable, and shows how little

¹ 1 Sam. xviii. 10; x. 5; 2 Kings iii. 15, 16.

² Quoted in Mackay's "Progress of the Intellect," ii. 192.

³ Newman, "Heb. Mon." p. 34. Plato derived *μαδρος* from *μαλισταθα*.

⁴ 2 Kings ix. 11; Jeremiah xxix. 26.

⁵ 2 Sam. vi. 16, 20; 1 Sam. xix. 24; Is. xx. 3; Ezek. iv. 4, 6, 8, 12, 15; 1 Kings xx. 35-38.

these enunciations were regarded by the Israelites from our modern point of view. Compare 2 Sam. vii. 10, where the Israelites are promised that they shall not be moved out of Canaan nor afflicted any more, with the subsequent denunciations of defeat and captivity in a strange land. Compare, also, 2 Sam. vii. 12-16, where the permanent possession of the throne is promised to David, and that the lineal descendant shall not fail him to sit upon the throne of Judah, with the curse pronounced on his last royal descendant, Coniah—"Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days; for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah" (Jer. xxii. 30; xxxvii. 30). See, also, the curious argument as to the *liability of prophecy to be rescinded*, in the same book (Jer. xxxiii. 17-26). The rescinding of the prediction or denunciation in the case of Hezekiah is recorded in Isaiah xxxviii. 1-5, and that of Jonah in the Book which bears his name, iii. 4-10.

III. It is now clearly ascertained, and generally admitted among critics, that several of the most remarkable and specific prophecies were never fulfilled at all, or only very partially and loosely fulfilled. Among these may be specified the denunciation of Jeremiah (xxii. 18, 19; xxxvi. 30), against Jehoiakim, as may be seen by comparing 2 Kings xxiv. 6;—and the denunciation of Amos against Jeroboam II. (vii. 11), as may be seen by comparing 2 Kings xiv. 23-29. The remarkable, distinct, and positive prophecies in Ezekiel (xxvi., xxvii.), relating to the conquest, plunder, and destruction of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar, we can now state on the highest authorities,¹ were not fulfilled. Indeed (in ch. xxix. 18) is a confession that he failed, at least so far as spoil went. The same may be said of the equally clear and positive prophecies of the conquest and desolation

of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. xliii. 10-13; Ezek. xxix.; xxx. 1-19), as Dr. Arnold, in his *Sermons on Prophecy* (p. 48) fully admits.¹ Jeremiah's prophecy of the Captivity of Seventy years, and the destruction of Babylon (xxv.) have generally been appealed to as instances of clear prophecy exactly and indisputably fulfilled. But in the first place, at the time this prediction was delivered, the success of Nebuchadnezzar against Jerusalem was scarcely doubtful; in the second place, the Captivity cannot, by any fair calculation, be lengthened out to seventy years;² and in the third place, the desolation of Babylon ("perpetual desolation" is the emphatic phrase) which was to take place at the end of the seventy years, as a punishment for the pride of Nebuchadnezzar, did not take place till long after. Babylon was still a flourishing city under Alexander the Great; and, as Mr. Newman observed, "it is absurd to present the emptiness of *modern* Babylon as a punishment for the pride of Nebuchadnezzar," or as a fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy.—Gen. xlix. 10, must also be considered to present a specimen of prophecy signally falsified by the event, and being composed in the palmiest days of Judah. was probably little more than a hyperbolical expression of the writer's confidence in the permanence of her grandeur. Finally, in Hosea we have a remarkable instance of self-contradiction, or virtual acknowledgment of the non-fulfilment of prophecy. In viii. 13 and ix. 3, it is affirmed, "Ephraim shall return to Egypt"; while in xi. 5, it is said, "Ephraim shall not return to

¹ Grote, *ubi supra*.—"Hebrew Monarchy," p. 363.

² The chronologies of Kings and Chronicles do not quite tally; but taking that of Jeremiah himself, the desolation begun in the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar, B.C. 599, was continued in B.C. 588, and concluded in B.C. 583.—The exile ended some say 538, some 536. The longest date that can be made out is 66 years, and the shortest only 43. To make out 70 years fairly, we must date from B.C. 606; the *first* year of Nebuchadnezzar.

¹ Heeren's "Researches," ii. 11. Grote, iii.

Egypt." Isaiah (xvii. 1) pronounces on Damascus a threat of ruin as emphatic as any that was pronounced against Tyre, Egypt, or Babylon. "It is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap." Yet Damascus is to this day the most flourishing city in those countries.

IV. We find from numberless passages both in the prophetic and the historical books, that for a considerable period the Hebrew nation was inundated with false prophets,¹ whom it was difficult and often impossible to distinguish from the true, although we have both prophetic and sacerdotal tests given for this express purpose. It even appears that some of those whom we consider as true prophets were by their contemporaries charged with being, and even punished for being, the contrary. In Deut. xviii. 20-22, the decision of the prophet's character is made to depend upon the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of his prophecy. In Deut. xiii. 1-5, this test is rejected, and the decision is made to rest upon the doctrine which he teaches: if this be false he is to be stoned, whatever miraculous proofs of his mission he may give.² From Jer. xxix. 26, 27, it appears that the High Priest assumed the right of judging whether a man was a false or a true prophet; though Jeremiah himself does not seem to have been willing to abide by this authority, but to have denounced priests and the prophets who supported them (Jer. v. 31). Pashur the priest, we learn (xx. 1-7), put Jeremiah in the stocks for his false prophecies; and Shemaiah reproves the Priest Jehoiada for not having repeated the punishment, and is violently denounced by the prophet in consequence (xxix. 24-32.).

V. In the case of nearly all the prophets we have little external or independent evidence as to the date at which their prophecies were uttered, and

none as to the period at which they were written down;¹ while the internal evidence on these points is dubious, conflicting, and, in the opinions of the best critics, generally unfavourable to the popular conceptions.—The Books of Kings and Chronicles, in which many of these prophecies are mentioned, and the events to which they are supposed to refer, are related, were written, or compiled in their present form, the former near the termination of the Babylonian Exile, or somewhere about the year B.C. 530, *i.e.*, from 50 to 200 years² after the period at which the prophecies were supposed to have been delivered;—while the latter appear to have been a much later compilation, some critics dating them about 260, and others about 400 before Christ.³

It is probably not too much to affirm that we have no instance in the prophetic Books of the Old Testament of a prediction, in the case of which we possess, at once and combined, clear and unsuspecting proof of the date, the precise event predicted, the exact circumstances of that event, and the inability of human sagacity to foresee it. There is no case in which we can say with certainty—even where it is reasonable to suppose that the prediction was uttered before the event—that the narrative has not been tampered with to suit the prediction, or the prediction modified to correspond with the event.⁴

¹ "Hebrew Monarchy," p. 352 (note.)

² Amos and Hosea flourished probably about 790 B.C. Jeremiah about 600. Zechariah about 520. De Wette, ii. 436. [Kuenen and Wellhausen think, however, that Kings was substantially completed before the Exile, *i.e.*, about B.C. 600, a few short passages implying an exilic standpoint being introduced afterward.]

³ Such at least is the most probable result at which critical science has yet arrived. De Wette, ii. 248, 265. [Driver, Intro., p. 486, thinks B.C. 332, the earliest date to which Chronicles can be assigned. Most critics agree, though Nöldeke puts it as late as B.C. 200.]

⁴ De Wette and other theologians consider that in many cases where the prophecy is unusually definite, this has certainly been done. ii. 357, 363.

¹ Jeremiah v. 31; xxiii. 16-34. Ezekiel xiv. 9-11.

² See also the whole remarkable chapter, Jer. xxviii.

The following remarks will show how little *certain* is our knowledge, even in the case of the principal prophets.

Isaiah, as we learn in the first and the sixth chapters of his Book, appeared as a Prophet in the last year of the reign of King Uzziah (B.C. 759), and prophesied till the fourteenth year of Hezekiah (B.C. 710). We hear of him in the 2nd Book of Kings and Chronicles, but not till the reign of Hezekiah; except that he is referred to in 2 Chron. xxvi. 22, as having written a history of Uzziah. The prophecies which have come down to us bearing his name extend to sixty-six chapters, *of the date of which* (either of their composition or compilation) *we have no certain knowledge*; but of which the last twenty-seven are confidently decided by competent judges to be the production of a different Writer, and a later age; and were doubtless composed during the Babylonish Captivity, later therefore than the year B.C. 600, or about 150 years after Isaiah. The grounds of this decision are given at length in De Wette.¹ They are found partly in the marked difference of style between the two portions of the Book, but still more in the obvious and pervading fact that the Writer of the latter portion *takes his stand* in the period of the Captivity, speaks of the Captivity as an existing circumstance or condition, and comforts his captive Countrymen with hopes of deliverance at the hand of Cyrus. It appears as the general summary result of critical research, that our present collection consists of a number of promises, denunciations, and exhortations, actually uttered by Isaiah, and brought together by command, probably of Hezekiah, greatly enlarged and interpolated by writings upwards of a century later than his time, which the ignorance or unfair intentions of subsequent collectors and commentators have not

scrupled to consecrate by affixing to them his venerable name.

Jeremiah appears to have prophesied from about B.C. 630–580, or before and at the commencement of the Captivity at Babylon, and the chief portion of his writings refer to that event, which in his time was rapidly and manifestly approaching. The prophecies appear to have been written down by Baruch, a scribe, from the dictation of Jeremiah (xxxvi.) and to have been collected soon after the return from exile,¹ but by whom and at what precise time is unknown;—and commentators discover several passages in which the original text appears to have been interpolated, or worked over again. Still, the text seems to be far more pure, and the real, much nearer to the professed, date, than in the case of Isaiah.

The genuineness of the Book of Ezekiel is less doubtful than that of any other of the Prophets. His prophecies relate chiefly to the destruction of Jerusalem, which happened during his time. He appears to have been carried into exile by the victorious Chaldeans about eleven years before they finally consummated the ruin of the Jewish Nation by the destruction of their Capital. His prophecies appear to have continued many years after the Captivity—sixteen according to De Wette.²

Of all the prophetic writings, the Book of Daniel has been the subject of the fiercest contest. Divines have considered it of paramount importance, both on account of the definiteness and precision of its predictions, and the supposed reference of many of them to Christ. Critics, on the other hand, have considered the genuineness of the Book to be peculiarly questionable; and few now, of any note or name, venture to defend it. In all probability we have no remains of the real prophecies of the actual Daniel—for that such a person, famed for his wisdom and virtue, did exist, appears from Ezek. xiv. and xxxviii.

¹ De Wette, ii. 364–390. [Several other sections of the Book are not the work of Isaiah, such as chaps. xiii., xv., xvi. 1–12, and probably others. The entire compilation cannot be earlier than B.C. 536.]

¹ De Wette, ii. 416 and 396.

² De Wette, ii. 426.

He must have lived about 570 years before Christ, whereas the Book which bears his name was almost certainly written in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, 110 years B.C. Some English Commentators¹ and Divines have endeavoured to escape from the obvious and manifold difficulties of the Book, by conceiving part of it to be genuine and part spurious.—But De Wette has shown² that we have no reason for believing it not to be the work of one hand. It is full of historical inaccuracies and fanciful legends; and the opening statement is an obvious error, showing that the Writer was imperfectly acquainted with the chronology or details of the period in which he *takes his stand*. The first chapter begins by informing us that in the *third* year of King Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, besieged and took Jerusalem, and carried the King (and Daniel) away captive. Whereas, we learn from Jeremiah that Nebuchadnezzar was not King of Babylon till the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim, and did not take Jerusalem till *seven* years later.³ It would be out of place to adduce all the marks which betray the late origin of this Book;—they may be seen at length in De Wette. It is here sufficient that we have *no proof whatever of its early date*, and that the most eminent critics have abandoned the opinion of its genuineness as indefensible.

III. *Thirdly*, We have already had ample proof that the Jewish Writers

¹ "I have long thought that the greater part of the book of Daniel is most certainly a very late work, of the time of the Maccabees; and the pretended prophecy about the Kings of Greece and Persia, and of the North and South, is mere history, like the poetical prophecies in Virgil and elsewhere. In fact you can trace distinctly the date when it was written, because the events up to that date are given with historical minuteness, totally unlike the character of real prophecy; and beyond that date all is imaginary."—Again, he thinks that criticism "proves the non-authenticity of great part of Daniel: that there may be genuine fragments in it is very likely."—"Arnold's Life and Cor." ii. 188.

² De Wette, ii. 499.

³ See the whole argument in De Wette, ii. 484 (note).

not only did not scruple to narrate past events as if predicting future ones—to present History in the form of Prophecy—but that they habitually did so. The instances are far too numerous to quote;—we will specify only a few of the most remarkable:—Gen. xxv. 23; xxvii. 28, 29, 39, 40; xlix. *passim*; Numb. xxiv.; Deut. iv. 27; xxviii. 25, 36, 37, 64.

We anticipate that these remarks will be met by the reply—"Whatever may be established as to the uncertainty which hangs over the date of those prophecies which refer to the temporal fortunes of the Hebrew Nation, no doubt can exist that all the prophecies relating to the Messiah were extant in their present form long previous to the advent of Him in whose person the Christian world agrees to acknowledge their fulfilment." This is true, and the argument would have all the force which is attributed to it, were the objectors able to lay their finger on a single Old Testament Prediction clearly referring to Jesus Christ, *intended by the utterers of it to relate to him*, prefiguring his character and career, and manifestly fulfilled in his appearance on earth. *This they cannot do*. Most of the passages usually adduced as complying with these conditions, referred, and were clearly intended to refer,¹ to eminent individuals in Israelitish History;—many are not prophecies at all;—the Messiah,

¹ "We find throughout the New Testament," says Dr. Arnold, "references made to various passages in the Old Testament, which are alleged as prophetic of Christ, or of some particulars of the Christian dispensation. Now if we turn to the context of these passages, and so endeavour to discover their meaning, according to the only sound principles of interpretation, it will often appear that they do not relate to the Messiah, or to Christian times, but are either expressions of religious affections generally, such as submission, love, hope, &c., or else refer to some particular circumstances in the life and condition of the writer, or of the Jewish nation, and do not at all show that anything more remote, or any events of a more universal and spiritual character, were designed to be prophesied."—"Sermons on the Interpretation of Prophecy." Preface, p. i.

² "The great prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah are, critics can now see, not strictly

the Anointed Deliverer, expected by the Jews, hoped for and called for by their Poets and Prophets, was of a character so different, and a career so opposite, to those of the meek, lowly, long-suffering Jesus, that the passages describing the one never could have been applied to the other, without a perversion of ingenuity, and a disloyal treatment of their obvious signification, which, if employed in any other field than that of Theology, would have met with the prompt discredit and derision they deserve.¹ There are, no doubt, scattered

predictions at all; and predictions which are strictly meant as such, like those in the Book of Daniel, are an embarrassment to the Bible rather than a main element of it."—*Literature and Dogma*, p. 114, by Matthew Arnold.

¹ This disingenuousness is obvious in one point especially: the Messianic Prophecies are interpreted *literally* or *figuratively*, as may best suit their adaptation to the received history of Jesus. Thus that "the wolf shall lie down with the lamb, and the lion eat grass like an ox," is taken figuratively: that the Messiah should ride into Jerusalem on an ass, is taken literally. The following passage, written five and twenty years subsequent to the text of this volume, may be quoted in confirmation. "And what were called the 'signal predictions' concerning the Christ of popular theology, as they stand in our Bibles, had and have undoubtedly a look of supernatural prescience. The employment of capital letters, and other aids, such as the constant use of the future tense, naturally and innocently adopted by interpreters who were profoundly convinced that Christianity needed these express predictions and that they *must* be in the Bible, enhanced, certainly, this look; but the look, even without these aids, was sufficiently striking. That Jacob on his death-bed should two thousand years before Christ have 'been enabled,' as the phrase is, to foretell to his son Judah that 'the sceptre shall not depart from Judah until *Shiloh* (or the Messiah) come, and to him shall the gathering of the people be,' *does* seem, when the explanation is put with it that the Jewish kingdom lasted till the Christian era and then perished, a miracle of prediction in favour of our current Christian theology. That Jeremiah should have 'been enabled' to foretell, in the name of Jehovah; 'The days come when I will raise to David a righteous Branch; in his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is the name whereby he shall be called, **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS!**'—*does* seem a wonder of prediction in favour of that tenet of the Godhead of the Eternal Son, for which the Bishops of Winchester and Gloucester are so

verses in the Prophetic and Poetical Books of the Hebrew Canon, which, *as quotations*, are apt and applicable enough to particular points in Christ's character and story;—but of what equally voluminous collection of poems or rhetorical compositions may the same not be

anxious to do something. For unquestionably Jehovah is often spoken of as the *saviour* of Judah and Israel: 'All flesh shall know that I the Eternal am thy *saviour* and thy *redeemer*, the mighty one of Jacob'; and in the prophecy given above as Jeremiah's, the Branch of David is clearly identified with Jehovah. Again, that David should say: 'The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand until I make thy foes thy footstool,'—*does* seem a prodigy of prediction to the same effect. That he should say: 'Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and so ye perish,' *does* seem a supernaturally prescient assertion of the Eternal Sonship. And so long as these prophecies stand as they are here given, they no doubt bring to Christianity all the support (and with the mass of mankind this is by no means inconsiderable) which it can derive from the display of supernatural prescience. But who will dispute that it more and more becomes known that these prophecies cannot stand as we have here given them? Manifestly, it more and more becomes known, that the passage from Genesis, with its mysterious *Shiloh* and the gathering of these people to him, is rightly to be rendered as follows: 'The pre-eminence shall not depart from Judah *so long as the people resort to Shiloh* (the national sanctuary before Jerusalem was won); *and the nations* (the heathen Canaanites) *shall obey him.*' We here purposely leave out of sight any such consideration as that our actual books of the Old Testament came first together through the piety of the house of Judah, and when the destiny of Judah was already traced; and that to say roundly: '*Jacob was enabled to foretell*, The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,' as if he were speaking of a prophecy preached and published by Dr. Cumming, is wholly inadmissible. For this consideration is of force, indeed, but it is a consideration drawn from the rules of literary history and criticism, and not likely to have weight with the mass of mankind. Palpable error and mistranslation are what will have weight with *them*. And what, then, will they say as they come to know (and do not and must not more and more of them come to know it every day?) that Jeremiah's supposed signal identification of Christ with the God of Israel: 'I will raise to David a righteous Branch, and this is the name whereby he shall be called, **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS,**' runs really: 'I will raise to David a righteous branch; in his days Judah shall be saved and

said?¹ Of the references made by the Evangelists to such passages, we shall speak hereafter.

The state of the case appears to be this:—That all the Old Testament Prophecies have been *assumed* to be genuine, inspired predictions; and when falsified in their obvious meaning and received interpretation by the event, have received immediately a new interpretation, and been supposed to refer to

Israel shall dwell safely; and this is the name whereby they shall call themselves: *The Eternal is our righteousness?* The prophecy thus becomes simply one of the many promises of a successor to David under whom the Hebrew people should trust in the Eternal and follow righteousness; just as the prophecy from Genesis is one of the many prophecies of the enduring continuance of the greatness of Judah. 'The Lord said unto my Lord,' in like manner—will not people be startled when they find that it ought to run instead: 'the Eternal said unto my lord the king,'—a simple promise of victory to a prince of God's chosen people?—and that: 'Kiss the Son,' is in reality, 'Be warned,' or 'be instructed;' 'Jay hold,' according to the Septuagint, 'on instruction?'—*Literature and Dogma*, pp. 110-113. See also pp. 91-106.

¹ Perhaps none of the Old Testament prophecies are more clearly Messianic than the following passage from Plato:—Ὁὕτω διακείμενος δὲ Δίκαιος μαστιγώσεται, στρεβλώσεται, δεθήσεται, ἐκκαυθήσεται τῷ φθαλμῷ, τελευτῶν πάντα κακὰ παθὼν ἀνασχινδυνεύθησεται. Plato, de Republicâ, i. ii. p. 361, E.

Speaking of this teacher of Mankind whom he expected, he says, "This just man will scarcely be endured by them—but probably will be scourged, racked, tormented, have his eyes burnt out and at last, having suffered all manner of evils, shall be *intaled*"—or as the original term will signify, "*Crucified*."

some other event. When the result has disappointed expectation, the conclusion has been, not that the prophecy was false, but that the interpretation was erroneous. It is obvious that a mode of reasoning like this is peculiar to Theological Inquirers.

From this habit of assuming that Prophecy was Prediction, and must have its fulfilment—which was perhaps prevalent among the Jews as among modern Divines—appears to have arisen the national expectation of a Messiah.—A Deliverer was hoped for, expected, prophesied, in the time of Jewish misery (and Cyrus was perhaps the first referred to); but as no one appeared who did what the Messiah, according to Prophecy, should do, they went on degrading each successive Conqueror and Hero from the Messianic dignity, and are still expecting the true Deliverer.—Hebrew and Christian Divines both start from the same assumed and unproven premises, viz.:—that a Messiah having been foretold, must appear;—but there they diverge, and the Jews show themselves to be the sounder logicians of the two:—the Christians, assuming that Jesus was the Messiah intended (though not the one *expected*), wrest the obvious meaning of the Prophecies to show that they were fulfilled in him;—while the Jews, assuming the obvious meaning of the Prophecies to be their real meaning, argue that they were not fulfilled in Christ, and therefore that the Messiah is yet to come

CHAPTER IV

THEISM OF THE JEWS IMPURE AND PROGRESSIVE

It is an assumption of the popular theology, and an almost universal belief in the popular mind, that the Jewish nation was selected by the Almighty to

preserve and carry down to later ages a knowledge of the One true God;—that the Patriarchs possessed this knowledge;—that Moses delivered and en-

forced this doctrine as the fundamental tenet of the national creed ;—and that it was, in fact, the received and distinctive dogma of the Hebrew people. This alleged possession of the true faith by one only people, while all surrounding tribes were lost in Polytheism, or something worse, has been adduced by divines in general as a proof of the truth of the sacred history, and of the divine origin of the Mosaic dispensation, and forms, indeed, one of the standard arguments of Theologians in the present day. Paley, the actual text-book of one of our Universities, writes of it thus :—

“Undoubtedly our Saviour assumes the divine origin of the Mosaic Institution ; and independently of his authority, I conceive it to be very difficult to assign any other cause for the commencement or existence of that Institution ; especially for the singular circumstance of the Jews adhering to the Unity, when every other people slid into polytheism ; for their being men in religion, children in everything else ; behind other nations in the arts of peace and war, superior to the most improved in their sentiments and doctrines relating to the Deity.”¹

Milman² speaks of the pure monotheism of the Jews in a similar strain :

“The religious history of this people is no less singular. In the narrow slip of land inhabited by their tribes the worship of one Almighty Creator of the Universe subsists, as in its only sanctuary. *In every stage of society, under the pastoral tent of Abraham, and in the sumptuous Temple of Solomon, the same creed maintains its inviolable simplicity.* . . . Nor is this merely a sublime speculative tenet ; it is the basis of their civil constitution, and of their national character. As there is but one Almighty God so there is but one People under his special protection, the descendants of Abraham.”

Now, the passage we have italicised is surely an extraordinary over-statement of the case. Without going so far as Bauer

(Theol. des Alt. Test. i. 4) who thinks that the Jews *as a nation* scarcely became true monotheists till after the Captivity, it seems difficult not to recognise that they did not believe in the *exclusive* existence of one sole God in the earlier times—perhaps not till a comparatively late period of their history ;—that their early and popular notions of the Deity were eminently coarse, low, and unworthy ;—that among them, as among all other nations, the conceptions of God formed by individuals varied according to their intellectual and spiritual capacities, being poor and anthropomorphic among the ignorant and coarse-minded, pure and lofty among the virtuous and richly-gifted ;—and, finally, that these conceptions gradually improved and became purified and ennobled, as the Hebrews advanced in civilisation—being, generally speaking, lowest in the Historical Books, amended in the Prophetical Writings, and reaching their highest elevation among the Poets of the Nation.

In its progress from Feticism to pure Theism, the human mind generally passes through three stages—or to speak more correctly, man's idea of God passes through three forms of development. We have him represented first as the *God of the individual or family* ; then as the God of the *nation* ; lastly as the God of the *human race*.—Now we find all these three views of Deity in the Old Testament—sometimes, it is true, strangely jumbled together, as might be expected in books written by different persons at different times—but on the whole bearing pretty distinct marks of the periods at which they respectively prevailed.

The representations of God in the history of Abraham appear to imply that the God whom he worshipped was a *family God*, selected, probably, by him for some reason unknown to us, out of a number of others who were worshipped by his fathers and his tribe. We are expressly told that the father and grandfather of Abraham “worshipped other

¹ Paley's Evidences of Christianity.

² History of the Jews, i, 4.

Gods";—and the representations given of the God of Abraham, and of his proceedings during the lives of the three Patriarchs, are so mean and material that it is difficult to conceive how a knowledge of the One true God, Maker of Heaven and Earth, could have been ascribed to them. God appears to Abraham with two angels in the form of men—they are spoken of as "three men"—sits at the door of his tent—partakes of his repast—is angry at the laughter of Sarah, and an altercation takes place between them; after which He discusses with him the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, and informs him that He is going down thither to see whether the reports which have reached him are correct. "Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nachor: and *they served other Gods.*" (Joshua xxiv. 2). "The God of Abraham and the God of Nachor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us" (Gen. xxxi. 53). There are not wanting traces of Polytheism in the earlier portions of Hebrew History. The expression *Jehovah Elohim*, "The God of Gods," may, perhaps, be taken as an indication. Bauer thinks that "the Elohim, who were probably at one time worshipped as equal Gods, are in Genesis recognised as subordinate deities, with whom Jehovah, the highest Eloah, enters into council" (Theol. des Alt. Test. i. 3). It will be remembered that Laban, a near relative of Abraham, whose sister he had expressly selected as his son Isaac's wife, pursued Jacob for having "stolen his Gods" (Gen. xxxi. 30). He therefore worshipped fetiches. In Gen. xxxv. 2-4, we find Jacob collecting the strange Gods worshipped by his household, and hiding them under an oak. It is certainly remarkable that both Abraham and Isaac should insist upon their sons marrying into an idolatrous family, if they had really believed their own God to be the only one.

Jacob's ideas of God are, as might be

expected from his mean and tricky character, even lower than those of Abraham. He makes a *condition*, on which he will *select* Jehovah to be *his* God, and will give Him a tithe of all his possessions (Gen. xxviii. 20);—he represents Him as his confidant in cheating Laban, and wrestles with Him bodily to extort a blessing. Who, after reading such passages can for a moment accept the belief that Jacob and Job entertained the same conceptions of God.

In process of time the descendants of Abraham multiplied and became a numerous people, and naturally continued the worship of that God who had done so much for their forefathers. Thus the *family God* of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob gradually enlarged into the *national God* of the Israelites, to whose worship they adhered with greater or less tenacity, with greater or less exclusiveness, during their residence in Egypt. As the history proceeds the conceptions of this God seem to become purer and loftier, till, in the mind of Moses, an intellectual and highly-educated man, versed in all the learning of the Egyptians, they often (as far as we can guess what came from him) reached to a sublime simplicity of expression rarely surpassed. Still, there is no distinct proof that Moses disbelieved in the existence of other Gods:—the God whom he serves is still "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob";—He is not asserted to be the *only* God; the existence and power of rival Deities is not denied, but is even admitted by implication. All that Moses claims for Jehovah is, not that he is the *Sole* God, but that he is superior to all others, "Who is like unto Thee, Jehovah, among the Gods?" (Ex. xv. 11¹). And he represents him to Pharaoh, by Jehovah's own command, as the "God of the Hebrews," not as the Supreme Lord of Heaven and Earth. Even in

¹ Jethro says; "Now I know that Jehovah is greater than all gods: for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly, he was above them all."—(Exod. xviii. 11.)

the delivery of the Commandments, the great foundation of the Law, it is not said, "There is no God but Jehovah," but only "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the House of Bondage; *thou shalt have* no other Gods beside Me (or before Me)." The whole of the xxivth chapter of Joshua confirms this view: he there urges the Israelites to choose Jehovah, not as the only God, whom to desert would be to become Atheists, but as a God whose bounties to them had been so great that it would be black ingratitude not to prefer Him to all others. The whole history of the lapses of the Jewish Nation into idolatry also discourages the idea of their having been really monotheists. The worship of the golden calf and the Canaanitish gods was quite natural on the supposition of Jehovah being merely a paramount and preferred God:—monstrous, if they had believed Him to be the only one. Moreover, their idolatry is always spoken of as *infidelity*, not as *atheism*.

As civilisation advanced, prophets, sages, and poets arose among the Hebrews, to whom the limited and anthropomorphic conceptions of the Deity, prevalent among the people, were painfully inadequate and revolting;—and they endeavoured by nobler representations of the object of their worship to convert the national religion into a pure theism; in which, however, it is thought by many that they did not succeed till after the Captivity. After this idea had once taken root, the nation never showed any disposition to relapse into idolatry. And even to the latest period of the Canonical writings we find representations both of the nature and attributes of Jehovah so utterly discrepant as to leave no doubt that among the Jews, as among all other nations, the God of the wise and the God of the ignorant—the God of the Priests and the God of the Prophets—were the embodiment of two very different classes of ideas. Let anyone compare the partial, unstable, revengeful, and deceit-

ful God of Exodus and Numbers with the sublime and unique Deity of Job and the nobler Psalms, or even the God of Isaiah with the God of Ezekiel and Daniel—and he can scarcely fail to admit that the conception of the One living and true God was a plant of slow and gradual growth in the Hebrew mind, and was due far less to Moses, the Patriarchs, or the Priests, than to the superiority of individual minds at various periods of their history. Compare the following representations which we have arranged in parallel columns.

And Jehovah spake to Moses, saying—Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them—And thou shalt put the mercy-seat above upon the ark, . . . and there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee.—Exod. xxv. 8, 21–22.

And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, that the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle: and Jehovah talked with Moses.—And Jehovah spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto a friend.—Exod. xxxiii. 9, 11.

For they have heard that thou Jehovah art among this people, that thou Jehovah art seen face to face.—Numbers xiv. 14.

And Jehovah said, Behold there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock. And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by! And I will take away mine

But will God in very deed dwell on the earth? Behold the Heaven, and the Heaven of Heavens, cannot contain Thee; how much less this House that I have builded!—1 Kings viii. 27.

Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?—Ps. cxxxix. 7–10.

Lo, he goeth by me, and I see him not; he passeth on also, but I perceive him not.—Job ix. 11.

Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.—Job xxxii. 8, 9.

O Jehovah my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty: Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment; who stretchest out the Heavens like a curtain; who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters; who maketh the clouds

hand, and thou shalt see my back parts; but my face shall not be seen.—Exod. xxxiii. 21-24.

And Moses returned to the Lord, and said, Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? Why is it that thou hast sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered thy people at all.—Exod. v. 22, 23.

And Jehovah said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. And Jehovah said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so.—1 Kings xxii. 20-23.

And they went in unto Noah in the ark, and the Lord shut him in.—Gen. vii. 16.

And Jehovah came down to see the city

his chariot; who walketh on the wings of the wind.—Psalm civ. 1-3.

Then Job answered and said, I know it is so of a truth; but how should man be just with God? If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand.

For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment.—Job ix. 2, 3; 32.

For the word of the Lord is right, and all his works are done in truth. He loveth righteousness and judgment.—Ps. xxxiii. 4, 5.

Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight.—Prov. xii. 22.

The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.—Prov. xv. 3.

Jehovah looketh from Heaven: he beholdeth

and the tower which the children of men builded.—Gen. xi. 5.

And Noah built an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake.—Gen. viii. 20, 21.

But ye shall offer the burnt-offering for a sweet savour unto the Lord.—Num. xxviii. 27.

And ye shall offer a burnt-offering, a sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savour, unto the Lord, thirteen bullocks, two rams, and fourteen lambs of the first year; they shall be without blemish.—Num. xxix. 13, 36.

all the sons of men.—Psalm xxxiii. 13.

I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is mine and the cattle upon a thousand hills. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee; for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving.—Ps. l. 9-14.

For thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt-offering.—Ps. li. 16.

Wherewith shall I come before Jehovah, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offering, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgressions, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?—Micah vi. 6-8.

CHAPTER V

ORIGIN OF THE GOSPELS

THE current idea respecting the nature of the Gospel History is, that the four Evangelists were eye-witnesses (or the amanuenses of eye-witnesses) of the

events which they relate; and that we have, in fact, embodied in their narratives, four independent and corroborative testimonies to the words and deeds of

Christ. Their substantial agreement is appealed to in proof of their fidelity, and their numerous and circumstantial discrepancies are accepted as proof of their independence.¹ Let us examine what foundation can be discovered for this current opinion. Have we any reason to believe that all the Evangelists, or that any of them, were companions of Christ—eye- and ear-witnesses of his career? And if not, what does critical Science teach us of the probable origin of the four gospels?

The first Gospel has come down to us under the title of the Gospel of, or according to, St. Matthew: and the tradition of the Church is that it was written (probably about A.D. 68) by Matthew the publican, one of the twelve apostles, the same who was called by Jesus while "sitting at the receipt of custom." This is distinctly stated by several of the Early Fathers, as the received opinion or tradition—as by Papias (A.D. 116), Irenæus (A.D. 178), Origen (A.D. 230), Epiphanius (A.D. 368), and Jerome (A.D. 392).² All these fathers, however, without exception, expressly affirm that Matthew wrote his Gospel in the Hebrew language, whereas the Gospel which *we* receive as Matthew's

is written in Greek; and not only have we no account of its having been translated, and no guarantee of such translation being a faithful one, but learned men are satisfied from internal evidence that *it is not a translation at all*, but must have been originally written in Greek.¹ Our present Gospel, therefore, cannot be *the* Gospel to which the fathers above cited refer. It would appear simply that Matthew did write a history, or rather *memorabilia*, of Christ (for the expression *τα λογια* says no more), but that this was something quite different from our Gospel.² This notion is confirmed by the fact that the Ebionites and Nazarenes, two Christian sects, possessed a Hebrew Gospel, which they considered to be the only genuine one, and which they called the Gospel according to Matthew.³ It appears, however, to have been so materially different from our first Gospel as entirely to negative the supposition of the latter being a translation from it.

The only external testimony, then, which exists to show that Matthew the apostle wrote a gospel, shows at the same time that our first Gospel is not the one which Matthew wrote. External evidence, therefore, gives us no reason

¹ Thus, Lardner says, "I have all my days read and admired the first three Evangelists, as independent witnesses, and I know not how to forbear ranking the other opinion among those bold as well as groundless assertions in which critics too often indulge *without considering the consequences*."—Dr Lardner, like many other divines, required to be reminded that critics have nothing to do with consequences, but only with truths, and that (to use the language of Algernon Sydney), "a consequence cannot destroy a truth."

² Papias, whose information on this as on other matters seems to have been derived from John, who is called "the Presbyter," an elder of the Church at Ephesus, simply says, "Matthew wrote the divine oracles (*τα λογια*) in the Hebrew tongue, and every man interpreted them as he was able."—Irenæus says, "Matthew, then, among the Jews, wrote a Gospel in *their own language*, while Peter and Paul were preaching the Gospel at Rome."—Origen and Jerome both state that (according to the tradition come down to them) the first Gospel was written by Matthew the publican *in Hebrew*.

¹ Hug, in a most luminous and learned essay, has succeeded in rendering this, if not certain, at least in the highest degree probable; and his views are supported by Erasmus, Webster, Paulus, and De Wette.—The only critic of equal eminence who adopts the opposite opinion is Eichhorn.

² It seems to us very probable, however, as Hennell suggests, "that someone after Matthew wrote the Greek Gospel which has come down to us, incorporating these Hebrew *λογια* (and perhaps mainly framed out of them), whence it was called the Gospel *according to* Matthew, and in the second century came to be considered as the work of the Apostle."—Hennell's *Origin of Christianity*, p. 124. [Schmiedel, art. *Gospels*, Ency. Bib., bluntly says that "for the authorship of the first Gospel the Apostle Matthew must be given up."]

³ Hug, *Introd.* part ii. § 7, pp. 317, 320, 392.—Jerome allows that many considered it to have been the genuine original Gospel of Matthew.—Thirlwall's *Introd.* to Schleiermacher, 48-50, and notes.

to believe that it was the production of an eye-witness; and it is worthy of remark that the author nowhere names himself, nor claims the authority of an eye-witness. Internal evidence goes further, and we think effectually negatives the notion.

1. In the first place, many events are recorded at which we know from the record that Matthew was not present—some, indeed, at which none of the disciples were present; and yet all these are narrated in the same tone and with the same particularity as the other portions of the narrative—sometimes even with more minute circumstantiality. Such are the Incarnation (c. i.), the story of the Magi (ii.), the Temptation (iv.), the Transfiguration (xvii.), the Agony and the prayer in Gethsemane (xxvi.), the denial of Peter (xxvi.), the dream of Pilate's wife (xxvii.), the conversation between Judas and the Priests, and that between Pilate and the Priests (xxvii.), and, finally, that between the Priests and the Soldiers about the missing body of Jesus (xxviii.).

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that if the writer was not present at the colloquy of Pilate with the Chief Priests about the security of the grave of Jesus, neither was he present at the feeding of the five thousand, or the calming of the waves.

2. Secondly, the abruptness of the transitions, the fragmentary style of the narrative, and the entire absence of all those details as to the mode and object of the frequent journeys indicated,¹ which we should expect from a companion, and which we find in Luke's account of Paul's travels—all point to the conclusion that the writer was a compiler, not an eye-witness.

3. The same conclusion is drawn from the circumstance that his frequent double narratives of the same events indicate the confusion of a man who was compiling from fragmentary materials, rather than the fulness and clearness of personal

recollection.¹ De Wette and Credner dwell much upon this argument.

4. If, as the great majority of critics imagine, Mark and Luke had Matthew's Gospel before them when they wrote their own, it is certain that *they* could not have regarded him as either an eye-witness or a very accurate authority, as they do not hesitate both to retrench, to deviate from, and to contradict him. Moreover, the proem to Luke's Gospel must, we think, by all unbiassed minds be regarded as fatal to the hypothesis of the authors of any of the gospels then in existence having been either disciples or eye-witnesses. It is clear from that, that although many histories of Christ were then extant, none of them had any peculiar or paramount authority.

5. The author of the first Gospel scarcely appears to have been acquainted with any portion of Christ's Ministry, except that of which Galilee was the scene.

The second Gospel, like the first, bears no author's name; but by Papias, and Irenæus,² and (following them) by the

¹ *Ex. gr.*, the cure of the blind men—the feedings—the demand of a sign—the accusation regarding Beelzebub.

² Papias, our earliest source of information on the matter, was Bishop of Hieropolis, and must have been intimate with many contemporaries of the Apostles, and perhaps had conversed with the Apostle John. His works are now lost, with the exception of a few fragments preserved by Eusebius. "Nothing (says Dr. Middleton) more effectually demonstrates the uncertainty of all tradition, than what is delivered to us by antiquity concerning this very Papias. Irenæus declares him to have been the companion of Polycarp, and the disciple of St. John the Apostle. But Eusebius tells us that he was not a disciple of St. John the Apostle but of John the Presbyter, who was a companion only of the Apostle, but whom Irenæus mistook for the Apostle. Now from Papias, through Irenæus, came most of the early traditions, some of them relating to the millennium, of the most monstrous character, which Irenæus does not scruple to ascribe to our Saviour, and which fully dispose us to credit the account of Eusebius, who says, 'Papias was a weak man, of very shallow understanding, as appears from his writings; and by mistaking the meaning of the Apostles, imposed these silly traditions upon Irenæus and

¹ Hennell, p. 121.

universal tradition of the Church, is attributed to Mark, a friend and fellow-traveller of Peter, Barnabas, and Paul, who is several times mentioned in the New Testament.¹ Papias says expressly that he was neither a hearer nor a follower of Christ, but compiled his Gospel from information obtained from Peter, whose "interpreter"² he is said to have been. Papias gives "the Presbyter John," supposed to have been an elder of the Ephesian Church, as his authority. Mark, then, it is certain, was not an eye-witness. Nor have we any reason, beyond the similarity of name, to believe that the writer of the second Gospel was the same Mark who is men-

tioned in the Acts as the companion of Paul and Barnabas (*not* of Peter, by the way), nor the same who is mentioned in 1 Peter v. 13 as his son. Mark was one of the commonest of Roman names; and it is probable that the idea of the identity of the *three* Marks was an imagination of Papias merely.

Neither was the author of the third Gospel an eye-witness. His poem merely claims to set forth faithfully that which he had heard from eye-witnesses. Irenæus is the first person who distinctly mentions Luke as the author of this Gospel; but little doubt appears to exist that he wrote both the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, and was the companion of Paul in many of his voyages.¹

The authorship of the fourth Gospel has been the subject of much learned and anxious controversy among theologians. The earliest, and only very important, external testimony we have is that of Irenæus (A.D. 178), who says, that after Luke wrote, "John, the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned upon his breast, likewise published a Gospel while he dwelt at Ephesus in Asia." The last chapter of the Gospel contains an attestation of its having been written by John (verse 24); but as this attestation obviously does not proceed from John himself,² and as we do not know from whom it does proceed, its authority can have little weight. It is generally believed that the Gospel and the first epistle proceed from the same pen, but if the second and third epistles are genuine,³ it is very questionable whether this pen was that of John *the Apostle*; for though, in the first chapter of the first epistle, the writer declares himself

the greatest part of the ecclesiastical writers who, reflecting on the age of man, and his near approach to the Apostles, were drawn by him into the same opinions." In another passage, indeed, Eusebius speaks of Papias in a much more respectful manner, as remarkable for eloquence and Scriptural knowledge; but this passage is not found in the older copies, and is supposed to be spurious. It is obvious, therefore, that little reliance can be placed on any traditions which are traced to Papias. Irenæus, our next earliest authority, derives weight from his antiquity alone. His extreme childishness goes far to discredit many of his statements, and no reliance can be placed upon such of them as are at variance with the conclusions of critical science. His traditions of what John had related to the elders regarding the millennium are worse than anything in the Koran, *yet he gives them as "testified by Papias."* The following passage will induce us to receive with great caution any evidence he gives regarding the origin and authenticity of the Gospels:—"As there are four quarters of the world in which we live, and four chief winds, and the Church is spread over all the earth, but the pillar and support of the Church is the Gospel and its breath of life, *plainly the Church must have four columns, and from them must come forth four blasts,*" &c., &c.—*Adv. Hæres.* c. iii. It would be melancholy to reflect that through such sources our only surviving testimony on these matters is derived, had these matters the supreme importance usually ascribed to them.

¹ Acts xii. 12, 25; xiii. 5-13; xv. 37. Col. iv. 10. Phil. 24. 1 Peter v. 13.

² What this could mean, as applied to a man who "spoke with tongues," it is for the Church to explain. ["All that can be said to be certain is this, that it is vain to look to the Church fathers for trustworthy information on the origin of the Gospels"]—Schmiedel, *loc. cit.*

¹ [The author's opinion must be set aside in the light of recent research: "If Luke cannot have been the author of Acts, neither can he have been the author of the third Gospel." Schmiedel, *loc. cit.*]

² De Wette doubts the genuineness of the whole chapter, and internal evidence is certainly against it.

³ Their genuineness, however, is doubted both by Eusebius and Origen.—See De Wette, i. §§ 23, 24.

to have been personally acquainted with Jesus, yet in the second and third epistles he calls himself "the Elder." Now there was a John at Ephesus (from whom Papias derived all his information, and who, he says, was also a disciple of Jesus), to whom the title of "Elder" (*πρεσβύτερος*) was given, *to distinguish him from the Apostle John.*

The balancing of the internal evidence for and against the supposition that the Apostle John was the author of the Gospel, is a matter of extreme difficulty. The reasons adduced in behalf of each opinion are very strong. Hug entertains no doubt that the decision should be in the affirmative;—Bretschneider almost proves the negative;—De Wette finds it impossible to decide;—while Strauss, who in his earlier editions had expressed himself satisfied that the Gospel was not genuine, writes thus in the preface to the third edition: "With De Wette and Neander in my hand, I have recommenced the examination of the fourth Gospel, and this renewed investigation has shaken the doubts I had conceived against its authenticity and credibility;—not that I am convinced that it is authentic, but neither am I convinced that it is not." In his *New Life of Jesus*, however, written thirty years after his first great book, he finally and confidently decides *against* its authenticity. Renan, in the first edition of his *Vie de Jésus*, accepted the fourth Gospel as genuine, and largely maimed the completeness and beauty of his estimate of Christ by doing so. In the thirteenth edition (1867) he entirely discards his previous assumption, and decides after long investigation that it was *not* the work of the Apostle John. In the same year was published Mr. J. J. Tayler's *Character of the Fourth Gospel*, in which the writer, after an exhaustive examination of the whole question, indisputably, as it seems to us, establishes the same negative conclusion.¹

¹ [Unquestionably the trend of present-day criticism is on the negative side.]

One argument against the supposition of John having been the author of the fourth Gospel has impressed my mind very forcibly. It is this: that several of the most remarkable events recorded by the other Evangelists, at which we are told by them that only *Peter, James, and John were present*, and of which, therefore, John alone of all the evangelists could have spoken with the distinctness and authority of an eye-witness, are entirely omitted—we may say, *ignored*—by him. Such are the raising of Jairus's daughter, the Transfiguration, the agony in Gethsemane. Now, on the assumption that John was the author of the fourth Gospel,—either he had *not* seen the works of the other Evangelists, in which case he would certainly not have omitted to record narratives of such interest and beauty, especially that of the Transfiguration; or he *had* seen them, and omitted all notice of them because he could not confirm the statements: for we cannot imagine that he did not record them in consequence of finding them already recorded, and seeing nothing to alter in the relation;—as an eye-witness, he would certainly, had they been true, have given them at least a passing word of confirmation, and we find that he does, on more than one occasion, relate events of less moment already recorded in the other Gospels, as the feeding of the five thousand, the anointing of Jesus's feet, &c. But *all the events said to have been witnessed by John alone, are omitted by John alone!* This fact seems fatal either to the reality of the events in question, or to the genuineness of the fourth Gospel.—Thus much, however, seems certain, and admitted;—that, if the Gospel in question were the genuine composition of the Apostle John, it must have been written when he was at least ninety years of age—when his recollections of events and conversations which had passed sixty years before had become faint and fluctuating—when ill-digested Grecian learning had overlaid the simplicity of his fisherman's character, and

his Judaic education—and the scenes and associations of Ionia had overpowered and obscured the recollections of Palestine. It therefore becomes, as we shall see hereafter, an inquiry of only secondary moment. An almost identical conclusion has been expressed many years later by a critic incomparably more competent than I can pretend to be. Renan says:—"L'esprit de Jésus n'est pas là; et si le fils de Zébédée a vraiment tracé ces pages, il avait certes bien oublié en les écrivant le lac de Génésareth et les charmants entretiens qu'il avait entendus sur ses bords."—*Vie de Jésus*, Introd. xxxi.

Of the first three (or, as they are commonly termed, the Synoptical) Gospels, we *know* that two, and we *believe* that all three, were not the productions of eye-witnesses.¹ The question then arises, in what manner, and from what materials, were they composed? This subject has for a long period exercised the minds of the most acute and learned divines of Germany, as Eichhorn, Credner, Bretschneider, De Wette, Hug, Schleiermacher, and Strauss; and the results of their investigations may be thus briefly summed up.

The numerous and irreconcilable discrepancies observable in the three Evangelists preclude the supposition of their having all drawn their information from one and the same source—while the still more remarkable points of similarity and agreement, often extending to the most minute verbal peculiarities, entirely forbid the idea of their having derived their materials from independent, and therefore mutually confirmatory, sources.

Three different hypotheses have been formed by competent judges to account for those marked characteristics of the first three Evangelists. Eichhorn (and, following him, Dr. Marsh) adopted the idea of an original document, now lost, written in the Hebrew or Syro-Chaldaic

language (the Aramaic Gospel, as it is called by some), from which all three Evangelists copied their accounts, with additions and omissions peculiar to themselves. With many divines this hypothesis is still the favourite one;—but, in addition to the difficulty arising from the fact that we can nowhere find any allusion to the existence of such a document, more minute criticism discovered so many peculiarities inexplicable on this theory that its credit was much shaken, and its principal supporter, Eichhorn, was driven, in order to maintain it, to admit modifications which have made it almost unintelligible. The hypothesis appears to us to have been since completely demolished by the reasonings of Hug, Thirlwall, and Schleiermacher.¹ An ingenious modification of this theory by Giesler, *who substitutes an oral for a written original*, is explained and controverted by Dr. Thirlwall, in the admirable treatise we have already quoted (p. cxvi). The poem to Luke's Gospel, moreover, tacitly, but effectually, negatives the supposition that *he* was acquainted with any such original and paramountly authoritative document.

The second hypothesis is the prevalent one—that one of the Evangelists wrote first, and that the others copied him, with alterations, additions, and omissions, dictated by their own judgment or by extraneous sources of information. Matthew is generally considered to have been the earliest writer; but critics differ in the relative order they assign to Mark and Luke—some, as Mill, Hug, and Wetstein, conceiving that Luke copied both from Mark and Matthew; and others, as De Wette and Griesbach,

¹ "For my part (says this latter) I find it quite enough to prevent me from conceiving the origin of the Gospel according to Eichhorn's theory, that I am to figure to myself our good Evangelists surrounded by five or six open rolls or books, and that too in different languages, looking by turns from one into another, and writing a compilation from them. I fancy myself in a German study of the 19th century, rather than in the primitive age of Christianity."—Schleiermacher, "Crit. Essay on Luke," Intr. p. 6.

¹ [As we have seen, none of the Gospels are the work of eye-witnesses.]

arguing that Mark was the latest in order of time, and made use of both his predecessors. Mr. Kenrick, in a masterly analysis (*Prosp. Rev.* xxi.), has, however, we think, succeeded in making it more than probable that Mark's Gospel was both first in order of time and in fidelity of narration.¹

This theory has been much and minutely examined, and to our minds it appears unsatisfactory. It accounts for the agreements, but not for the discrepancies, of the Gospels; and Dr. Thirlwall, in his translation of Schleiermacher, has succeeded in showing that it is highly improbable, if not wholly inadmissible.

The third hypothesis, which was first propounded by Lessing, and has since been revived and elaborated by Schleiermacher (one of the highest theological authorities of Germany), seems to us to have both critical evidence and *a priori* likelihood in its favour. These writers presume the existence of a number of *fragmentary narratives*, some oral, some written, of the actions and sayings of Christ, such as would naturally be preserved and transmitted by persons who had witnessed those wonderful words and deeds. Sometimes there would be two or more narratives of the same event, proceeding from different witnesses; sometimes the same original narrative in its transmission would receive intentional or accidental variations, and thus come slightly modified into the hands of different Evangelists. Sometimes detached sayings would be preserved without the context, and the Evangelists would *locate* them where they thought them most appropriate, or provide a context for them, instances of which are numberless in the Gospels.² But all these materials would be fragmentary. Each witness

would retain and transmit that portion of a discourse which had impressed him most forcibly, and two witnesses would retain the same expressions with varying degrees of accuracy.¹ One witness heard one discourse, or was present at one transaction only, and recorded that one by writing or verbally, as he best might. Of these fragments some fell into the hands of all the Evangelists—some only into the hands of one, or of two:² and in some cases different narratives of the same event, expression, or discourse would fall into the hands of different Evangelists, which would account for their discrepancies—sometimes into the hands of one Evangelist, in which case he would select that one which his judgment (or information from othersources) prompted, or would compile an account from them jointly. In any case, the evangelical narratives would be *compilations from a series of fragments of varying accuracy and completeness*. The correctness of this theory of the origin of the Gospels seems to be not so much confirmed as distinctly asserted by Luke: "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us which from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word."

"The first step (says Schleiermacher)³ towards a Christian History was a natural and reasonable desire on the part of those who had believed on Jesus, without having a knowledge of his person. These

persons are often given in the same terms, though the circumstances which led to them are differently described."—Thirlwall, cxvi.

¹ The habit of retaining and transmitting discourses orally was much more common then than now, and the practice carried to great perfection. The learning of the Jews was transmitted exclusively by oral tradition from one generation to another, and we entertain little doubt that the fragments both of narratives and discourses which formed the materials of our Evangelists were almost entirely oral.—(See Thirlwall, cxviii. Norton, i. 287.)

² Thus the materials of the first three Evangelists were evidently collected chiefly in Galilee; those of the fourth came principally from Judæa.

³ "Crit. Essay on Luke," Introd. 12-14.

¹ [The priority of Mark is now generally recognised. On this question and the interdependence of the gospel writers the best authority is Abbott in his article *Gospels*, in the *Ency. Brit.*]

² "The verbal agreement is generally greater in reports of the discourses of Christ than in relations of events; and the speeches of other

individuals would undoubtedly be glad to learn some particulars of his life, in order to place themselves as nearly as possible on an equality with their elder and more fortunate brethren. In the public assemblies of the Christians this desire was of course only incidentally and sparingly gratified, when a teacher happened to refer to memorable sayings of Christ which could only be related together with the occasion which had called them forth: more copious and detailed accounts they could only procure in familiar intercourse upon express inquiry. And in this way many particulars were told and heard, most of them, probably, without being committed to writing; but, assuredly, much was very soon written down, partly by the narrators themselves, as each of them happened to be pressed by a multiplicity of questions on a particular occurrence, respecting which he was peculiarly qualified to give information. Still more, however, must have been committed to writing by the inquirers, especially by such as did not remain constantly in the neighbourhood of the narrators, and were glad to communicate the narrative again to many others, who, perhaps, were never able to consult an eye-witness. In this way detached incidents and discourses were noted down. Notes of this kind were at first, no doubt, less frequently met with among the Christians settled in Palestine, and passed immediately into more distant parts, to which the pure oral tradition flowed more scantily. They, however, appeared everywhere more frequently, and

were more anxiously sought for, when the great body of the original companions and friends of Christ was dispersed by persecutions, and still more when that first generation began to die away. It would, however, have been singular if, even before this, the inquirers who took those notes had possessed only detached passages; on the contrary, they, and still more their immediate copiers, had undoubtedly become collectors also, each according to his peculiar turn of mind: and thus one, perhaps, collected only accounts of miracles; another, only discourses; a third, perhaps, attached exclusive importance to the last days of Christ, or even to the scenes of his resurrection. Others, without any such particular predilection, collected all that fell in their way from good authority."

The work from which the above is a quotation is a masterly analysis of Luke's gospel, with a view to test the correctness of the author's hypothesis as to the origin of the evangelical histories; and the success is, we think, complete. His conclusion is as follows (p. 313):—

"The main position is firmly established, that Luke is neither an independent writer, nor has made a compilation from works which extended over the whole course of the life of Jesus. He is from beginning to end no more than the compiler and arranger of documents, which he found in existence, and which he allows to pass unaltered through his hands. His merit in this capacity is twofold—that of arrangement and of judicious selection."¹

CHAPTER VI

FIDELITY OF THE GOSPEL HISTORY.—NATURE AND LIMITS

HAVING in our last chapter arrived at the conclusion that the Gospels are compilations from a variety of fragmentary narratives, and reports of discourses and

conversations, oral or written, which

¹ [The synoptical problem is a very complicated one, and none of the hypotheses, taken apart, affords a satisfactory solution. They must

were current in Palestine from thirty to forty years after the death of Jesus—we now come to the very interesting and momentous inquiry, how far these narratives and discourses can be accepted as accurate and faithful records of what was actually said and done?—whether they can be regarded as thoroughly and minutely correct?—and, if not, in what respects and to what extent do they deviate from that thorough and minute correctness?

It is clear at first view that the same absolute reliance cannot be placed upon a narrative compounded from traditionary fragments, as upon a consecutive history related by an eye-witness. Conceding to *both* faithful intention and good, though imperfect, powers of memory, there are obvious elements of inaccuracy in the one case which do not appertain to the other. To the corruptions, lapses, and alterations inseparable from transmission, especially when oral, is added the uncertainty arising from the *number* of the original sources of the tradition, whose character, capacity, and opportunities of knowledge are unknown to us. If Luke had recorded only what he had seen, or Mark only what he had heard from Peter, we should have comparatively ample means of forming a decision as to the amount of reliance to be placed upon their narrations; but when they record what they learned from perhaps a dozen different narrators—some original, others only second-hand, and all wholly unknown—it becomes obvious that causes of inaccuracy are introduced, the extent of the actual operation of which on the histories that have come down to us, it is both extremely important and singularly difficult to estimate.

This inquiry we consider as of paramount interest to every other question of criticism; for on the conclusion to which it leads us depends the whole—not of Christianity, which, be combined, the sources-hypothesis and the borrowing-hypothesis, supported by an oral tradition prior to them both.]

as we view it, is unassailable, but—of *textual* or *dogmatic Christianity*, *i.e.*, the Christianity of nine-tenths of nominal Christendom. We proceed, therefore, to ask what evidence we possess for assuming or impugning the minute fidelity of the Gospel history.

There are certain portions of the Synoptical Gospels the genuineness of which has been much disputed, viz., the first two chapters of Matthew—the first two of Luke—and the last twelve verses of the xvth chapter of Mark.¹ Into this discussion we cannot enter, but must refer such of our readers as wish to know the *grounds* of decision to Norton, Hug, De Wette, Eichhorn, and Griesbach. The *result* of critical inquiry seems to be, that the only solid ground for supposing the questioned portions of Luke and Matthew not to be by the same hand as the rest of their respective gospels, is the obviously insufficient one of the extraordinary character of their contents;²—while the spuriousness of the last twelve verses of Mark is established beyond question;—the real Gospel of Mark (all of it, at least, that has come down to us) ends with the 8th verse of the xvth chapter. In our subsequent remarks we shall therefore treat the whole of the acknowledged text of these gospels as genuine, with the exception of the conclusion of Mark;—and we now proceed to inquire into the nature and limits of the fidelity of Matthew's record.

In the first place, while admitting to the fullest extent the general clearness and fulness with which the character of Jesus is depicted in the first Gospel, it is important to bear in mind that—as Hug has clearly³ proved—it was written with a

¹ See Norton, i. 16, 17.

² Strauss, i. 117, 142. Hug, 469–479. See also Schleiermacher. Norton, however, gives some reasons to the contrary, which deserve consideration, i. 209.

³ “All Matthew's reflections are of one kind. He shows us, as to everything that Jesus did and taught, that it was characteristic of the Messiah. On occasion of remarkable events, or a recital of parts of the discourses of Jesus, he refers us to the ancient scriptures of the Jews

special, we might almost say a polemical, object. It was composed, less to give a continuance and complete history of Jesus, than to prove that he was the expected Messiah; and those passages were therefore selected out of the author's materials which appeared most strongly to bear upon and enforce this conclusion. The remembrance of this *object* of Matthew's will aid us in forming our judgment as to his fidelity.

According to the universal expectation, the Messiah was to be born of the seed of Abraham, and the lineage and tribe of David. Accordingly, the Gospel opens with an elaborate genealogy of Jesus, tracing him through David to Abraham. Now, in the *first* place, this genealogy is not correct:—*secondly*, if the remainder of the chapter is to be received as true, it is in no sense the genealogy of Jesus; and, *thirdly*, it is wholly and irreconcilably at variance with that given by Luke.

1. In verse 17, Matthew sums up the genealogy thus:—"So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon until Christ are fourteen generations."—Now (passing over as unnecessarily minute and harsh the criticism of Strauss, that by no way of counting can we make out fourteen generations in the last series, without disturbing the count of the others), we must call attention to the fact that the number fourteen in the second series *is only obtained by the deliberate omission of four generations*, viz., three between Joram and Ozias, and one between Josiah and Jeconiah—as may be seen by referring to 1 Chron. iii. There is also (at verse 4–6) another apparent, and we think, certain, error. Only four generations are reckoned

in which this coming Saviour is delineated, and shows in detail that the great ideal which flitted before the minds of the Prophets was realised in Jesus." Hug, *Introd.* 312. These references are twelve in Matthew, two in Mark, and three in Luke. Again, he says (p. 384), "Matthew is an historical deduction; Mark is history."

between Naasson, who lived in the time of Moses, and David, a period of four hundred years. (Compare Num. i. 7, Ruth v. 20).

2. The genealogy here given, correct or incorrect, is the genealogy of *Joseph*, who was in no sense whatever the father (or any relation at all) of Jesus, since this last, we are assured (verses 18 to 25), was in his mother's womb before she and her husband came together. The story of the Incarnation and the genealogy are obviously at variance; and no ingenuity, unscrupulously as it has been applied, can produce even the shadow of an agreement; and when the flat contradiction given to each other by the 1st and 18th verses are considered, it is difficult for an unprejudiced mind not to feel convinced that the author of the genealogy (both in the first and third Gospels) was ignorant of the story of the Incarnation, though the carelessness and uncritical temper of the evangelist—a carelessness partially avoided in the cases of Luke, by an interpolation¹—has united the two into one compilation.

3. The genealogy of Jesus given by Luke is wholly different from that of Matthew; and the most desperate efforts of divines have been unable to effect even the semblance of a reconciliation. Not only does Matthew give 26 generations between David and Joseph where Luke has 41, but they trace the descent through an entirely different line of ancestry. According to Matthew, the father of Joseph was named Jacob—according to Luke, Heli. In Matthew, the son of David through whom Joseph descended is Solomon;—in Luke it is Nathan. Thence the genealogy of Matthew descends through the known royal line—the genealogy of Luke through an obscure collateral branch. The two lines only join in Salathiel and Zoro-

¹ Luke iii. 23, "Jesus . . . being, *as was supposed* (ὡς ἐνομίζετο), the son of Joseph,"—a parenthesis which renders nugatory the whole of the following genealogy, and cannot have originally formed a part of it.—The 16th verse of Matthew also bears indications of a similar emendation.

babel; and even here they differ as to the father of Salathiel and the son of Zorobabel. Many ingenious hypotheses have been broached to explain and harmonise these singular discrepancies, but wholly in vain. One critic supposes that one evangelist gives the pedigree of the adoptive, the other of the real father of Joseph. Another assumes that one is the genealogy of Joseph, and the other that of Mary—a most convenient idea, but entirely gratuitous, and positively contradicted by the language of the text. The circumstance that any man could suppose that Matthew, when he said “Jacob begat Joseph,” or Luke, when he said “Joseph was the son of Heli,” could refer to the wife of the one, or the daughter-in-law of the other, shows to what desperate stratagems polemical orthodoxy will resort in order to defend an untenable position.

The discrepancy between Matthew and Luke in their narratives of the miraculous conception affords no ground for suspecting the fidelity of the former. Putting aside the extraordinary nature of the whole transaction—a consideration which does not at present concern us—the relation in Matthew is simple, natural, and probable; the surprise of Joseph at the pregnancy of his wife (or his *betrothed*, as the words may mean); his anxiety to avoid scandal and exposure; his satisfaction through the means of a dream (for among the Jews dreams were habitually regarded as means of communication from heaven); and his abstinence from all conjugal connection with Mary till after the birth of the miraculous infant,—present precisely the line of conduct we should expect from a simple, pious, and confiding Jew.

But when we remember the dogmatic object which, as already mentioned, Matthew had in view, and in connection with that remembrance read the 22nd and 23rd verses, the whole story at once becomes apocryphal, and its origin at once clear. “All these things were done,” says Matthew, “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the Prophet, say-

ing, Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son,” &c., &c. Now this is one of the many instances which we shall have to notice in which this evangelist quotes prophecies as intended for Jesus, and as fulfilled in him, which have not the slightest relation to him or his career. The adduced prophecy¹ is simply an assurance sent to the unbelieving Ahaz, that before the child, which the wife of Isaiah would shortly conceive (see Isa. viii. 2-4), was old enough to speak, or to know good from evil, the conspiracy of Syria and Ephraim against the King of Judæa should be dissolved; and had manifestly no more reference to Jesus than to Napoléon. The conclusion, therefore, is unavoidable, that the events said to have occurred in fulfilment of a prophecy, which Matthew *wrongly* supposed to have reference to them, were by him imagined, or modified into accordance with the supposed prophecy; since it is certain that they did *not*, as he affirms, take place, “in order that the prophecy might be fulfilled.”

Pursuing this line of inquiry, we shall find many instances in which this tendency of Matthew to find in Jesus the fulfilment of prophecies, which he *erroneously* conceived to refer to him, has led him to narrate circumstances respecting which the other evangelists are silent, as well as to give, with material (but *intentional*) variations, relations which are

¹ “Therefore the Lord spake unto Ahaz, saying, . . . Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. . . . Before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.”—Isa. vii. 10-16.

“And I went unto the prophetess, and she conceived and bare a son. Then said the Lord unto me . . . before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the King of Assyria.”—viii. 3, 4.

No divine of character will now, we believe, maintain that this prophecy had any reference to Jesus; nor ever would have imagined it to have, without Matthew's intimation. — See “Hebrew Monarchy,” p. 262.

common to them all—a peculiarity which throws great suspicion over several passages. Thus in ii. 13-15, we are told that immediately after the visit of the Magi, Joseph took Mary and the child, and fled into Egypt, remaining there till the death of Herod, “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.” The passage in question occurs in Hosea, xi. 1, and has not the slightest reference to Christ. It is as follows:—“When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.” Here is an event related, very improbable in itself, flatly contradicted by Luke’s history¹ and which occurred, we are told, that a prophecy might be fulfilled to which it had no reference, of which it was no fulfilment, and which, in fact, was no prophecy at all.

A similar instance occurs immediately afterwards in the same chapter. We are told that Herod, when he found “that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under”;—an act which, whether suitable or not to the known character of Herod (who was cruel and tyrannical, but at the same time crafty and politic, not silly nor insane²)—must, if it had occurred, have created a prodigious sensation, and made one of the most prominent points in Herod’s history³—yet of which none of the other

evangelists, nor any historian of the day, nor Josephus (though he devoted a considerable portion of his history to the reign of Herod, and does not spare his reputation), makes any mention. But this also, according to Matthew’s notion, was the fulfilment of a prophecy. “Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama there was a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.”—Here, again, the adduced prophecy was quite irrelevant, being simply a description of the grief of Judea for the captivity of her children, accompanied by a promise of their return.¹

A still more unfortunate instance is found at the 23rd verse, where we are told that Joseph abandoned his intention of returning into Judea, and turned aside into Galilee, and came and dwelt at Nazareth, “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.” Now, in the first place, the name Nazarene was not in use till long afterwards;—secondly, there is no such prophecy in the Old Testament. The evangelist, perhaps, had in his mind the words that were spoken to the mother of Samson (Judg. xiii. 5) respecting her son: “The child shall be a Nazarite (*i.e.* one bound by a vow, whose hair was forbidden to be cut, which never was the case with Jesus²) to God from the womb.”

In this place we must notice the marked discrepancy between Matthew and Luke, as to the original residence of

highly improbable, for had Herod wished to secure the death of Jesus, so cunning a prince would have sent his messengers along with the Magi, not awaited their doubtful return.

¹ The passage is as follows:—“A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children, refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the Lord, Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy.”—Jer. xxxi. 15, 16.

² See Num. vi. 2-6.

¹ Luke’s account entirely precludes the sojourn in Egypt. He says that *eight* days after the birth of Jesus he was circumcised, *forty* days after was presented in the temple, and that when these legal ceremonies were accomplished, he went with his parents to Nazareth.

² Neander argues very ably that such a deed is precisely what we should expect from Herod’s character. But Sir W. Jones gives reason for believing that the whole story may be of *Hindoo origin*.—“Christian Theism,” p. 84, where the passage is quoted.

³ Mr. Milman (“Hist. Jews,” b. xii.), however, thinks differently, and argues that, among Herod’s manifold barbarities, “the murder of a few children in an obscure village” would easily escape notice. The story is at least

the parents of Jesus. Luke speaks of them as living at Nazareth *before* the birth of Jesus: Matthew as having left Bethlehem, the birth-place of their child, to go to Nazareth, only after that event, and from peculiar considerations. Critics, however, are disposed to think Matthew right on this occasion.

There are, however, several passages in different parts of the Evangelists which suggest serious doubts as to whether Jesus were really born at Bethlehem, and were really a lineal descendant of David, and whether both these statements were not unfounded inventions of his followers to prove his title to the Messiahship. In the first place, the Jews are frequently represented as urging that Jesus could not be the Messiah, because he was *not* born at Bethlehem; and neither Jesus nor his followers ever set them right upon this point. If he were really born at Bethlehem, the circumstance was generally unknown, and though its being unknown presented an obvious and valid objection to the admission of his claim to the Messianic character, no effort was made either by Christ or his disciples to remove this objection, which might have been done by a single word. (John vii. 41-43, 52; i. 46.) "Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the Scripture said that Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was? So there was a division among the people because of him."—Again, the Pharisees object to Nicodemus, when arguing on Jesus' behalf—"Search and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet."

The three Synoptical evangelists (Matt. xxii. 41; Mark xii. 35; Luke xx. 41) all record an argument of Christ addressed to the Pharisees, the purport of which is to show that the Messiah need not be, and could not be, the Son of David. "While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David. He saith unto them, How

then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, the Lord saith unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool! If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?" Now,—passing by the consideration that, as Mr. Arnold informs us, "the translation ought to run, 'The Eternal said unto my lord the king,' and was a simple promise of victory to a prince of God's chosen people,"—is it conceivable that Jesus should have brought forward the passage as an argument if he were really a descendant of David? Must not his intention have been to argue that, though *not* a son of David, he might still be the Christ?

In xxi. 2-4, 6, 7, the entry into Jerusalem is thus described: "Then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, *and a colt with her*: loose them and bring them to me. . . . And the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass *and the colt*, and put on *them* their clothes, and set him thereon" (literally "*upon them*," ἐπ' αὐτῶν). Now, though two animals may well have been brought, the foal naturally accompanying its mother, yet the description (in ver. 16), representing Jesus as sitting upon *both* animals, is absurd; and, again, Mark, Luke, and John, who all mention the same occurrence, agree in speaking of one animal only. But the liberty which Matthew has taken with both fact and probability is at once explained, when we read in the 4th verse: "All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, *and a colt the foal of an ass.*"¹

As a final example, we may instance

¹ The quotation is from Zechariah ix, 9; the passage has reference to the writer's own time, and the second animal is obviously a mere common poetical reduplication, such as is met with in every page of Hebrew poetry. But Matthew thought a *literal* similitude essential. "And" ought to have been translated "even."

the treachery of Judas. The other evangelists simply narrate that Judas covenanted with the chief priests to betray Jesus. Matthew, however, relates the conversation between the traitor and his fellow-conspirators as minutely as if he had been present, specifies the exact sum of money that was given, and the use to which it was put by the priests (the purchase of the Potter's field), when returned to them by the repentant Judas.¹ Here, as usual, the discrepancy between Matthew and his fellow-evangelists is explained by a prophecy which Matthew conceived to apply to the case before him, and thought necessary therefore should be literally fulfilled; but which, on examination, appears to have had no allusion to any times but those in which it was uttered, and which, moreover, is not found in the prophet whom Matthew quotes from, but in another.² The passage as quoted by Matthew is as follows:—"And they took the thirty pieces of silver; the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value, and gave them for the Potter's field, as the Lord appointed me." The original passage in Zechariah is given in a note.

To pass from this ground of want of confidence in Matthew's fidelity, we may specify two others:—*first*, we find several discrepancies between him and the other evangelists, in which there is reason to

¹ Luke, however, in the Acts (i. 18), states that Judas himself purchased the field with the money he had received, and died accidentally therein. Matthew says he returned the money, and went and hanged himself.

² Matthew quotes Jeremiah, but the passage is contained in Zechariah xi. 12, 13. Some people, however, imagine that the latter chapters of Zechariah do really belong to Jeremiah. Others conceive the passage to be contained in some lost book of Jeremiah. "And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord." The word "potter" is a translation *made to accommodate* Matthew. The LXX. has "treasury" or "foundry," as it were our "mint."

believe that he was wrong; and, *secondly*, we find words and parts of discourses put by him into Jesus' mouth, which there is ample reason to believe that Jesus never uttered.

I. The second chapter opens with an account (peculiar to Matthew) of the visit of the wise men of the East to Bethlehem, whither they were guided by a star which went before them, and stood over the house in which the infant Jesus lay. The general legendary character of the narrative—its similarity in style with those contained in the apocryphal gospels—and more especially its conformity with those astrological notions which, though prevalent in the time of Matthew, have been exploded by the sounder scientific knowledge of our days—all unite to stamp upon the story the impress of poetic or mythic fiction; and its admission into his history is not creditable to Matthew's judgment, though it may not impugn his fidelity; as it may have been among his materials, and he had no critical acumen which should lead him to reject it.

In Matt. viii. 28–34, we have an account of the healing of *two* demoniacs, whose diseases (or whose devils, according to the evangelist) were communicated to an adjacent herd of swine. Now, putting aside the great improbability of two madmen, as fierce as these are described to be, living together, Mark and Luke¹ who both relate the same occurrence, state that there was *one* demoniac, obviously a much preferable version of the narrative.

In the same manner, in chap. xx. 30–34, Matthew relates the cure of *two* blind men near Jericho. Mark and Luke² narrate the same occurrence, but speak of only *one* blind man. This story affords also an example of the evangelist's carelessness as a compiler, for (in chap. ix. 27) he has already given the same

¹ Mark v. 1; Luke viii. 26. There are other discrepancies between the three narratives, both in this and the following case, but they are beside our present purpose.

² Mark x. 46; Luke xviii. 35.

narrative, but has assigned to it a different locality.

A still more remarkable instance of Matthew's tendency to amplification, or rather to multiplication and repetition, is found in xiv. 16, *et seq.*, and xv. 32, *et seq.*,¹ where the two miraculous feedings of the multitude are described. The feeding of the five thousand is related by all four evangelists; but the repetition of the miracle, with a slight variation in the number of the multitude and of the loaves and fragments, is peculiar to Matthew and to Mark.² Now, that both these narratives are merely varying accounts of the same event (the variation arising from the mode in which the materials of the gospel history were collected, as explained in our preceding chapter), and that only one feeding was originally recorded, is now admitted by all competent critics,³ and appears clearly from several considerations.—*First*, Luke and John relate only one feeding; in the next place, the two narratives in Matthew are given with the same accompaniments, in a similar, probably in the very same, locality; *thirdly*, the particulars of the occurrence and the remarks of the parties are almost identically the same on each occasion; and, finally (what is perfectly conclusive), in the second narration, the language and conduct both of Jesus and his disciples show a perfect unconsciousness of any previous occurrence of the same nature. Is it credible, that if the disciples had, a few days before, witnessed the miraculous feeding of the "five thousand" with "five loaves and two fishes," they should on the second occasion, when they had "seven loaves and a few small fishes," have replied to the suggestion of Jesus

¹ The parallel passages are Mark vi. 35; Luke ix. 12; John vi. 5.

² See Mark viii. 1, *et seq.* The language of the two evangelists is here so precisely similar, as to leave no doubt that one copied the other, or both a common document. The word baskets is *κόφιναι* in the first case, and *σπυρίδες* in the second, in both evangelists.

³ See also Schleiermacher, p. 144, who does not hesitate to express his full disbelief in the second feeding.

that the fasting multitude should again be fed, "whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness as to fill so great a multitude?" It is certain that the idea of two feedings having really taken place, could only have found acceptance in minds preoccupied with the doctrine of the plenary inspiration and infallibility of Scripture. It is now entirely abandoned by all divines except the English, and by the few thinkers even among them. A confirmatory argument, were any needed, might be drawn from observing that the narrative of the fourth evangelist agrees in some points with Matthew's first, and in some with his second account.

The story contained in xvii. 17, *et seq.*, of Jesus commanding Peter to catch a fish in whose mouth he should find the tribute money, has a most pagan and unworthy character about it, harmonises admirably with the puerile narratives which abound in the apocryphal gospels, and is ignored by all the other evangelists.

In xxvii. 24, we find this narrative: "When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but rather that a tumult was made, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it." Now, in the first place, this symbolic action was a Jewish, not a Roman, ceremony,¹ and as such most unsuitable and improbable in a Roman governor, one of a nation noted for their contempt of the habits and opinions of their subject nations. In the second place, it is inconceivable that Pilate should so emphatically have pronounced his own condemnation, by declaring Jesus to be a "just man" at the very moment when he was about to scourge him, and deliver him over to the most cruel tortures.

¹ It appears from Deut. xxi. 1-9, that the washing of the hands was a specially-appointed Mosaic rite, by which the authorities of any city in which murder had been committed were to avow their innocence of the crime and ignorance of the criminal.

In Matthew's account of the last moments of Jesus, we have the following remarkable statements (xxvii. 50-53):—"Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." Now, *first*, this extraordinary fact, if it be a fact (and it is said to have been a public one—"they appeared unto many"), is ignored by the other evangelists; nor do we find any reference to it in the Acts or the Epistles, nor any reason to believe that any of the apostles were aware of the occurrence—one, certainly, to excite the deepest interest and wonder. *Secondly*, the statement is a confused, if not a self-contradictory, one. The assertion in ver. 52, clearly is, that the opening of the graves, and the rising of the bodies of saints, formed a portion of that series of convulsions of nature which is said to have occurred at the moment when Jesus expired; whereas the following verse speaks of it as occurring "after his resurrection." To suppose, as believers in verbal accuracy do, and must do, that the bodies were re-animated on the Friday, and not allowed to come out of their graves till the Sunday, is clearly too monstrous to be seriously entertained. If, to avoid this difficulty, we adopt Griesbach's reading, and translate the passage thus: "And coming out of their graves, went into the holy city after the resurrection"—the question still recurs, "Where did they remain between Friday and Sunday? And did they, after three days' emancipation, resume their sepulchral habiliments, and return to their narrow prison-house, and their former state of dust?" Again, when we refer to the original, we find that it was *the bodies* (σώματα) which "arose"; but, if we suppose that the evangelist wrote gram-

matically, it could not have been the bodies which "came out of the graves," or he would have written ἐξελθόντα, not ἐξεlebόντες. Whence Bush¹ assumes that the *bodies* arose (or were raised, ἡγήροθη) at the time of the crucifixion, but lay down again,² and that it was the *souls* which came out of the graves after the resurrection of Christ and appeared unto many! We cannot, however, admit that souls inhabit graves.

There can, we think, remain little doubt in unprepossessed minds that the whole legend (it is greatly augmented in the apocryphal gospels³) was one of those intended to magnify and honour Christ,⁴ which were current in great numbers at the time when Matthew wrote, and which he, with the usual want of discrimination and somewhat omnivorous tendency which distinguished him as a compiler, admitted into his gospel;—and that the confusing phrase, "after his resurrection," was added either by him or by some previous transmitter, or later copier, to prevent the apparent want of deference and decorum involved in a resurrection which should have preceded that of Jesus.

In chap. xxvii. 62-66, and xxviii.

¹ See a very elaborate work of Professor Bush, entitled "Anastasis, or the Resurrection of the Body" (p. 210), the object of which is to prove that the resurrection of the *body* is neither a rational nor a scriptural doctrine.

² The Professor's notion appears to be that the *rising of the bodies* on the Friday was a mere mechanical effect of the earthquake, and that re-animation did not take place till the Sunday, and that even then it was not the *bodies* which arose.

³ The Gospel of the Hebrews says that a portion of the temple was thrown down. See also the Gospel of Nicodemus.

⁴ Similar prodigies were said, or supposed to accompany, the deaths of many great men in former days, as in the case of Cæsar (Virgil, Gorg. i. 463, *et seq.*). Shakespeare has embalmed some traditions of the kind, exactly analogous to the present case. See Julius Cæsar, Act ii. Sc. 2. Again he says: Hamlet, Act i. Sc. 1.

"In the most high and palmy state of Rome,
A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
The graves stood tenantless, and the sheeted dead
Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets."

11-15, we find a record of two conversations most minutely given—one between the chief priests and Pilate, and the other between the priests and the guards of the sepulchre—at which it is impossible the evangelist, and most improbable that any informant of his, could have been present;—and which, to our minds, bear evident marks of being subsequent fictions *supposed* in order to complete and render more invulnerable the history of Jesus' resurrection. It is extremely unlikely that the chief priests and Pharisees should have thought of taking precautions beforehand against a fraudulent resurrection. We have no reason to believe that they had ever heard of the prophecy to which they allude¹ for it had been uttered only to his own disciples, the twelve, and to them generally with more or less secrecy;² and we know that by them it was so entirely disregarded,³ or had been so completely forgotten, that the resurrection of their Lord was not only not expected, but took them completely by surprise. Were the enemies of Christ more attentive to, and believing on, his predictions than his own followers?

¹ It is true that John (ii. 19) relates that Jesus said publicly in answer to the Jews' demand for a sign, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it up again." This John considers to have reference to his resurrection, but we know that the Jews attach no such meaning to it, from ver. 20, and also from Matt. xxvi. 61.

² Matt. xvi. 21, xx. 19; Mark viii. 31, x. 32; Luke ix. 22, xviii. 33.

³ This is distinctly stated, John xx. 9: "For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead," and indeed it is clear from all the evangelical narratives.

The improbability of the sequel of the story is equally striking. That the guard placed by the Sanhedrim at the tomb should, all trembling with affright from the apparition (xxviii. 4), have been at once, and so easily, persuaded to deny the vision, and propagate a lie;—that the Sanhedrim, instead of angrily and contemptuously scouting the story of the soldiers, charging them with having slept, and threatening them with punishment, should have believed their statement, and, at the same time, in full conclave, resolved to bribe them to silence and falsehood;—that Roman soldiers, as it is generally assumed they were, who could scarcely commit a more heinous offence against discipline than to sleep upon their post, should so willingly have accepted money to accuse themselves of such a breach of duty;—are all too improbable suppositions to be readily allowed; especially when the 13th verse indicates a subsequent Jewish rumour as the foundation of the story, and when the utter silence of all the other evangelists and apostles respecting a narrative which, if true, would be so essential a feature in their preaching of the resurrection, is duly borne in mind.

Many minor instances in which Matthew has retrenched or added to the accounts of Mark, according as retrenchment or omission would, in his view, most exalt the character of Jesus, are specified in the article already referred to (*Prosp. Rev.* xxi.), which we recommend to the perusal of all our readers as a perfect pattern of critical reasoning.

CHAPTER VII

FIDELITY OF THE GOSPEL HISTORY CONTINUED—MATTHEW

In pursuing our inquiry as to the degree of reliance to be placed on Matthew's narrative, we now come to the considera-

tion of those passages in which there is reason to believe that the conversations and discourses of Christ have been in-

correctly reported : and that words have been attributed to him which he did not utter, or at least did not utter in the form and context in which they have been transmitted to us. That this should be so, is no more than we ought to expect *a priori* ; for, of all things, discourses and remarks are the most likely to be imperfectly heard, inaccurately reported, and materially altered and corrupted in the course of transmission from mouth to mouth. Indeed, as we do not know, and have no reason to believe, that the discourses of Christ were written down by those who heard them immediately after their delivery, or indeed much before they reached the hands of the evangelists, nothing less than a miracle perpetually renewed for many years could have preserved these traditions perfectly pure and genuine. In admitting the belief, therefore, that they are in several points imperfect and inaccurate, we are throwing no discredit upon the sincerity or capacity, either of the evangelists or their informants, or the original reporters of the sayings of Christ ;—we are simply acquiescing in the alleged operation of natural causes.¹ In some cases, it is true, we shall find reason to believe that the published discourses of Christ have been intentionally altered and artificially elaborated by some of the parties through whose hands they passed ; but in those days when the very idea of historical criticism was yet unborn, this might have been done without any unfairness of purpose. We know that at that period, historians of far loftier pre-

tensions and more scientific character, writing in countries of far greater literary advancement, seldom scrupled to fill up and round off the harangues of their orators and statesmen with whatever they thought appropriate for them to have said—nay, even to elaborate for them long orations out of the most meagre hearsay fragments.¹

A general view of Matthew, and still more a comparison of his narrative with that of the other three gospels, brings into clear light his entire indifference to chronological or contextual arrangement in his record of the discourses of Christ. Thus in ch. v., vi., vii., we have crowded into one sermon the teachings and aphorisms which in the other evangelists are spread over the whole of Christ's ministry. In ch. xiii. we find collected together no less than six parables of similitudes for the kingdom of heaven. In ch. x. Matthew compresses into one occasion (the sending of the twelve, where many of them are strikingly out of place) a variety of instructions and reflections which must have belonged to a subsequent part of the career of Jesus, where indeed they are placed by the other evangelists. In c. xxiv., in the same manner, all the prophecies relating to the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world are grouped together ; while, in many instances, remarks of Jesus are introduced in the midst of others with which they have no connection, and where they are obviously out of place ; as xi. 28-30, and xiii. 12, which evidently belongs to xxv. 29.

¹ This seems to be admitted even by orthodox writers. Thus Abp. Trench says :—"The most earnest oral tradition will in a little while lose its distinctness, undergo essential though insensible modifications. Apart from all desire to vitiate the committed word, yet, little by little, the subjective condition of those to whom it is entrusted, through whom it passes, will infallibly make itself felt ; and in such treacherous keeping is all which remains merely in the memories of men, *after a very little while*, rival schools of disciples will begin to contend not merely how their Master's words were to be accepted, but *what those very words were*."—Trench's "Hulsean Lectures," p. 15.

¹ This in fact was the *custom* of antiquity—the rule, not the exception :—See Thucydides, Livy, Sallust, &c. *passim*. We find also (see Acts v. 34-39), that Luke himself did not scruple to adopt this common practice, for he gives us a verbatim speech of Gamaliel delivered in the Sanhedrim, after the apostles had been expressly excluded, and which therefore he could have known only by hearsay report. Moreover, it is certain that this speech must have been Luke's, and not Gamaliel's, since it represents Gamaliel in the year A.D. 34 or 35, as speaking in the past tense of an agitator, Theudas, who did not appear, as we learn from Josephus, till after the year A.D. 44.

In c. xi. 12 is the following expression : "And from the days of John the Baptist *until now*, the kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by storm." Now, though the meaning of the passage is difficult to ascertain with precision, yet the expression, "from the days of John the Baptist until now," clearly implies that the speaker lived at a considerable distance of time from John ; and though appropriate enough in a man who wrote in the year A.D. 65, or 30 years after John, could not have been used by one who spoke in the year A.D. 30 or 33, while John was yet alive. This passage, therefore, must be regarded as coming from Matthew, not from Jesus.

The passage at c. xvi. 15-19 bears obvious marks of being either an addition to the words of Christ, or a corruption of them. "He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in Heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church ; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven ; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven ; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

The confession by Simon Peter of his belief in the Messiahship of Jesus is given by all the four evangelists, and there is no reason to question the accuracy of this part of the narrative. Mark and John, as well as Matthew, relate that Jesus bestowed on Simon the surname of Peter, and this part, therefore, may also be admitted. The remainder of the narrative corresponds almost exactly with the equivalent passages in the other evangelists ; but the 18th verse has no parallel in any of them. Moreover, the word "church" betrays its later origin. The word *ἐκκλησία*

was used by the disciples to signify those assemblies and organisations into which they formed themselves after the death of Jesus, and is met with frequently in the epistles, but nowhere in the gospels, except in the passage under consideration, and one other, which is equally, or even more, contestable.¹ It was in use when the gospel was written, but not when the discourse of Jesus was delivered. It must be taken as belonging, therefore, to Matthew, not to Jesus.

The following verse, conferring spiritual authority, or, as it is commonly called, "the power of the keys," upon Peter, is repeated by Matthew in connection with another discourse (in c. xviii. 18) ; and a similar passage is found in John (c. xx. 23), who, however, places the promise after the resurrection, and represents it as made to the apostles generally, subsequent to the descent of the Holy Spirit. But there are considerations which effectually forbid our receiving this promise, at least as given by Matthew, as having really emanated from Christ. In the *first* place, in both passages it occurs in connection with the suspicious word "church," and indicates an ecclesiastical as opposed to a Christian origin. *Secondly*, Mark, who narrates the previous conversation, omits this promise so honourable and distinguishing to Peter, which it is impossible for those who consider him as Peter's mouthpiece, or amanuensis, to believe he would have done, had any such promise been actually made.² Luke, the companion and intimate of Paul and other apostles, equally omits all mention of this singular conversation. *Thirdly*, not only do we know Peter's utter unfitness to be the depositary of such a fearful power, from his impetuosity and instability of character, and Christ's

¹ C. xviii. 17. "If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church ; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." The whole passage with its context, betokens an ecclesiastical, not a Christian spirit.

² See Thirlwall, cvii., "Intro. to Schleiermacher."

thorough perception of this unfitness, but we find that immediately after it is said to have been conferred upon him, his Lord addresses him indignantly by the epithet of Satan, and rebukes him for his presumption and unspirituality; and shortly afterwards this very man thrice denied his Master. Can anyone maintain it to be conceivable that Jesus should have conferred the awful power of deciding the salvation or damnation of his fellow-men upon one so frail, so faulty, and so fallible? *Does anyone believe that he did?* We cannot, therefore, regard the 19th verse otherwise than as an unwarranted addition to the words of Jesus, and painfully indicative of the growing pretensions of the Church at the time the gospel was compiled.

In c. xxviii. 19 is another passage which we may say with almost certainty never came from the mouth of Christ: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." That this definite form of baptism proceeded from Jesus, is opposed by the fact that such an allocation of the Father, Son, and Spirit does not elsewhere appear, except as a form of salutation in the epistles; while as a definite form of baptism it is nowhere met with throughout the New Testament. Moreover, it was not the form *used*, and could scarcely therefore have been the form *commanded*; for in the apostolic epistles, and even in the Acts, the form always is "baptising into Christ Jesus," or, "into the name of the Lord Jesus";¹ while the threefold reference to God, Jesus, and the Holy Ghost is only found in ecclesiastical writers, as Justin. Indeed, the formula in Matthew sounds so exactly as if it had been borrowed from the ecclesiastical ritual, that it is difficult to avoid the supposition that it was transferred thence into the mouth of Jesus. Many critics, in consequence, regard it as a subsequent interpolation.

¹ Rom. vi. 3. Gal. iii. 27. Acts ii. 38; viii. 16; x. 48; xix. 5.

There are two other classes of discourses attributed to Jesus both in this and in the other gospels, over the character of which much obscurity hangs—those in which he is said to have foretold his own death and resurrection; and those in which he is represented as speaking of his second advent. The instances of the first are in Matthew *five* in number, in Mark *four*, in Luke *four*, and in John *three*.¹

Now we will at once concede that it is extremely probable that Christ might easily have foreseen that a career and conduct like his could, in such a time and country, terminate only in a violent and cruel death; and that indications of such an impending fate thickened fast around him as his ministry drew nearer to a close. It is even possible, though in the highest degree unlikely,² that his study of the prophets might have led him to the conclusion that the expected Messiah, whose functions he believed himself sent to fulfil, was to be a suffering and dying Prince. We will not even dispute that he might have been so amply endowed with the spirit of prophecy as distinctly to foresee his approaching crucifixion and resurrection. But we find in the Evangelists themselves insuperable difficulties in the way of admitting the belief that he actually did predict these events, in the language, or with anything of the precision, which is there ascribed to him.

In the fourth gospel, these predictions are three in number,³ and in all the

¹ Matt. xii. 40; xvi. 21; xvii. 9, 22, 23; xx. 17-19; xxvi. 3. Mark viii. 31; ix. 10, 31; x. 33; xiv. 28. Luke ix. 22, 44; xviii. 32, 33; xxii. 15. John ii. 20-22; iii. 14; xii. 32, 33; all very questionable.

² It was in the highest degree unlikely, because this was neither the interpretation put upon the prophecies among the Jews of that time, nor their natural signification, but it was an interpretation of the disciples *ex eventu*.

³ We pass over those touching intimations of approaching separation contained in the parting discourses of Jesus during and immediately preceding the last supper, as there can be little doubt that at that time his fate was so imminent as to have become evident to any acute observer, without the supposition of supernatural information.

language is doubtful, mysterious, and obscure, and the interpretation commonly put upon them is not that suggested by the words themselves, nor that which suggested itself to those who heard them; but is one affixed to them by the Evangelist after the event supposed to be referred to; it is an *interpretatio ex eventu*.¹ In the three synoptical gospels, however, the predictions are numerous, precise, and conveyed in language which it was impossible to mistake. Thus (in Matt. xx. 18, 19, and parallel passages), "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again." Language such as this, definite, positive, explicit, and circumstantial, if really uttered, could not have been misunderstood, but must have made a deep and ineradicable impression on all who heard it, especially when repeated, as it is stated to have been, on several distinct occasions. Yet we find ample proof that *no such impression was made*;—that the disciples had no conception of their Lord's approaching death—still less of his resurrection;—and that so far from their expecting either of these events, both, when they occurred, took them entirely by surprise;—they were utterly con-

¹ In the case of the first of these predictions—"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,"—we can scarcely admit that the words were used by Jesus (if uttered by him at all) in the sense ascribed to them by John; since the words were spoken *in the temple*, and in answer to the demand for a sign, and could therefore only have conveyed, and have been intended to convey, the meaning which we know they actually did convey to the inquiring Jews. In the two other cases (or three, if we reckon viii. 28 as one), the language of Jesus is too indefinite for us to know what meaning he intended it to convey. The expression "to be lifted up" is thrice used, and may mean exaltation, glorification (its natural signification), or, artificially and figuratively, *might* be intended to refer to his crucifixion.

founded by the one, and could not believe the other.

We find them shortly after (nay, in one instance instantly after) these predictions were uttered, disputing which among them should be greatest in their coming dominion (Matt. xx. 24; Mark ix. 35; Luke xxii. 25);—glorying in the idea of thrones, and asking for seats on his right hand and on his left, in his Messianic kingdom (Matt. xix. 28, xx. 21; Mark x. 37; Luke xxii. 30); which, when he approached Jerusalem, they thought "would immediately appear" (Luke xix. 11, xxiv. 21). When Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, they first attempted resistance, and then "forsook him and fled"; and so completely were they scattered, that it was left for one of the Sanhedrim, Joseph of Arimathæa, to provide even for his decent burial;—while the women who "watched afar off," and were still faithful to his memory, brought spices to embalm the body—a sure sign, were any needed, that the idea of his resurrection had never entered into their minds. Further, when the women reported his resurrection to the disciples, "their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not" (Luke xxiv. 11). The conversation, moreover, of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus is sufficient proof that the resurrection of their Lord was a conception which had never crossed their thoughts;—and, finally, according to John, when Mary found the body gone, her only notion was that it must have been removed by the gardener (xx. 15).

All this shows, beyond, we think, the possibility of question, that the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus were wholly unexpected by his disciples. If further proof were wanted, we find it in the words of the evangelists, who repeatedly intimate (as if struck by the incongruity we have pointed out) that they "knew not," or "understood not," these sayings. (Mark ix. 31; Luke ix. 45, xviii. 34; John xx. 9).

Here, then, we have two distinct

statements, which mutually exclude and contradict each other. If Jesus really foretold his death and resurrection in the terms recorded in the gospels, it is inconceivable that the disciples should have *misunderstood* him; for no words could be more positive, precise, or intelligible than those which he is said to have repeatedly addressed to them. Neither could they have *forgotten* what had been so strongly urged upon their memory by their Master, as completely as it is evident from their subsequent conduct they actually did.¹ They might, indeed, have *disbelieved* his prediction (as Peter appears in the first instance to have done), but in that case his crucifixion would have led them to expect his resurrection, or, at all events, to think of it:—which it did not. The fulfilment of one prophecy would necessarily have recalled the other to their minds.

The conclusion, therefore, is inevitable—that the predictions were ascribed to Jesus after the event, not really uttered by him. It is, indeed, very probable that, as gloomy anticipations of his own death pressed upon his mind, and became stronger and more confirmed as the danger came nearer, he endeavoured to communicate these apprehensions to his followers, in order to prepare them for an event so fatal to their worldly hopes. That he did so, we think the conversations during, and previous to, the last supper afford ample proof. These vague intimations of coming evil—*intermingled and relieved, doubtless, by strongly expressed convictions of a future existence of reunion and reward*, disbelieved or disregarded by the disciples at the time—recurred to their minds after all was over; and gathering strength, and expanding in definiteness and fulness during constant repetition for nearly forty years, had, at the period when the Evangelists wrote, become consolidated into the fixed prophetic form in which they have been transmitted to us.

¹ Moreover, if they had so completely forgotten these predictions, whence did the evangelists derive them?

Another argument may be adduced, strongly confirmatory of this view. Jesus is repeatedly represented as affirming that his expected sufferings and their glorious termination must take place, *in order that the prophecies might be fulfilled*. (Matt. xxvi. 24, 54; Mark ix. 12, xiv. 49; Luke xiii. 33, xviii. 31, xxii. 37, xxiv. 27.) Now, the passion of the disciples for representing everything connected with Jesus as the fulfilment of prophecy, explains why they should have sought, after his death, for passages which might be supposed to prefigure it,¹—and why these accommodations of prophecy should, in process of time, and of transmission, have been attributed to Jesus himself. But if we assume, as is commonly done, that these references to prophecy really proceeded from Christ in the first instance, we are landed in the inadmissible, or at least the embarrassing and unorthodox, conclusion that he interpreted the prophets erroneously. To confine ourselves to the principal passages only, a profound grammatical and historical exposition has convincingly shown, to all who are in a condition to liberate themselves from dogmatic presuppositions, that in none of these is there any allusion to the sufferings of Christ.²

One of these references to prophecy in Matthew has evident marks of being an addition to the traditional words of Christ by the Evangelist himself. In

¹ "There were sufficient motives for the Christian legend thus to put into the mouth of Jesus, after the event, a prediction of the particular features of his passion, especially of the ignominious crucifixion. The more a Christ crucified became 'to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness' (1 Cor. i. 23), the more need was there to remove the offence by every possible means; and as, among the subsequent events, the resurrection especially served as a *retrospective* cancelling of that shameful death, so it must have been earnestly desired to take the sting from that offensive catastrophe *beforehand* also; and this could not be done more effectually than by such a minute prediction."—Strauss, iii. 54, where this idea is fully developed.

² Even Dr. Arnold admitted this fully. ("Sermons on Interpretations of Prophecy," Preface.)

Matt. xvi. 4, we have the following: "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of the prophet Jonas." The same expression precisely is recorded by Luke (xi. 29), with this addition, showing what the reference to Jonas really meant: "For as Jonas was a sign to the Ninevites, so also shall the Son of man be to this generation. The men of Nineveh shall rise up in judgment against this generation, and shall condemn it; *for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.*" But when Matthew repeats the same answer of Jesus in response to the same demand for a sign (xii. 40), he adds the explanation of the reference, "for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights [which Jesus was *not*, but only one day and two nights¹] in the heart of the earth";—and he then proceeds with the same context as Luke.

The prophecies of the second coming of Christ (Matt. xxiv.; Mark xiii.; Luke xvii. 22-37; xxi. 5-36) are mixed up with those of the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in a manner which has long been the perplexity and despair of orthodox commentators. The obvious meaning of the passages which contain these predictions—the sense in which they were evidently understood by the Evangelists who wrote them down—the sense which we know from many sources² they conveyed to the minds of the early Christians—clearly is, that the coming of Christ to judge the world should follow *immediately*³ ("im-

mediately," "in those days") the destruction of the Holy City, and should take place during the lifetime of the then existing generation. "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled" (Matt. xxiv. 34; Mark xiii. 30; Luke xxi. 32). "There be some standing here that shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matt. xvi. 28). "Verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come" (Matt. x. 23). "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" (John xxi. 23).

Now if these predictions really proceeded from Jesus, he was entirely in error on the subject, and the prophetic spirit was not in him; for not only did his advent not follow close on the destruction of Jerusalem, but 1800 years have since elapsed, and neither he nor the preliminary signs which were to announce him have yet appeared. If these predictions did *not* proceed from him, then the Evangelist has taken the liberty of putting into the mouth of Christ words and announcements which Christ never uttered.

Much desperate ingenuity has been exerted to separate the predictions relating to Jerusalem from those relating to the Advent: but these exertions have been neither creditable nor successful; and they have already been examined and refuted at great length. Moreover, they are rendered necessary only by two previous *assumptions*: first, that Jesus cannot have been mistaken as to the future; and, secondly, that he really uttered these predictions. Now, neither of these assumptions is capable of proof. The first we shall not dispute, because we have no adequate means of coming to a conclusion on the subject. But as to the second assumption, we think there are several indications that, though the predictions in question were current among the Christians when the gospels were composed, yet that they did not, at least as handed down to us, proceed

¹ Nay: possibly only a few hours.

² See 1 Cor. x. 11; xv. 51. Phil. iv. 5. 1 Thess. iv. 15. James v. 8. 1 Peter iv. 7. 1 John ii. 18. Rev. i. 1, 3; xxii. 7, 10, 12, 20.

³ An apparent contradiction to this is presented by Matt. xxiv. 14; Matt. xiii. 10, where we are told that "the gospel must be first preached to all nations." It appears, however, from Col. i. 5, 6, 23 (see also Romans x. 18), that St. Paul considered this to have been already accomplished in his time.

from the lips of Christ; but were, as far as related to the second advent, the unauthorised anticipations of the disciples; and, as far as related to the destruction of the city, partly gathered from the denunciations of Old Testament prophecy, and partly from actual knowledge of the events which passed under their eyes.

In the *first* place, it is not admissible that Jesus could have been so true a prophet as to one part of the prediction, and so entirely in error as to the other, both parts referring equally to future events. *Secondly*, the three gospels in which these predictions occur are allowed to have been written between the years 65 and 72 A.D., or during the war which ended in the destruction of Jerusalem¹; that is, they were written during and

after the events which they predict. They may, therefore, either have been entirely drawn from the events, or have been vaguely in existence before, but have derived their definiteness and precision from the events. And we have already seen in the case of the first evangelist, that he, at least, did not scruple to eke out and modify the predictions he recorded, from his own experience of their fulfilment. *Thirdly*, the parallel passages, both in Matthew and Mark, contain an expression twice repeated—"the elect"—which we can say almost with certainty was unknown in the time of Christ, though frequently found in the epistles, and used, at the time the gospels were composed, to designate the members of the Christian Church.

CHAPTER VIII

SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED—MARK AND LUKE

MANY of the criticisms contained in the last chapter—tending to prove that Matthew's Gospel contains several statements not strictly accurate, and attributes to Jesus several expressions and discourses which were not really uttered by him—are equally applicable both to Mark and Luke. The similarity—not to say identity—of the greater portion of Mark's narrative with that of Matthew leaves no room for doubt either that one evangelist copied from the other, or that both employed the same documents, or oral narratives, in the compilation of their histories. Our own clear conviction is that Mark was the earliest in time, and far the most correct in fact.

¹ The war began by Vespasian's entering Galilee in the beginning of the year A.D. 67, and the city was taken in the autumn of A.D. 70.

As we have already stated, we attach

to the Gospel of Mark, the companion of Peter. It originated with Papias, whose works are now lost, but who was stated to be a "weak man" by Eusebius, who records a few fragments of his writings. But if the tradition be correct, the omissions in this gospel, as compared with the first, are significant enough. It omits entirely the genealogies, the miraculous conception, several matters relating to Peter (especially his walking on the water, and the commission of the keys), and everything miraculous or improbable relating to the resurrection¹—everything, in fact, but the simple statement that the body

¹ We must not forget that the real genuine Gospel of Mark terminates with the 8th verse of the 16th chapter.

was missing, and that a "young man" assured the visitors that Christ was risen.

In addition to these, there are two or three peculiarities in the discourses of Jesus, as recorded by Mark, which indicate that the evangelist thought it necessary and allowable slightly to modify the language of them, in order to suit them to the ideas or the feelings of the Gentile converts; if, as is commonly supposed, it was principally designed for them. We copy a few instances of these, though resting little upon them.

Matthew, who wrote for the Jews, has the following passage, in the injunctions pronounced by Jesus on the sending forth of the twelve apostles: "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (x. 5). Mark, who wrote for the Gentiles, *omits entirely this unpalatable charge* (v. 7-13).

Matthew (xv. 24), in the story of the Canaanitish woman, makes Jesus say, "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Mark (vii. 26) *omits this expression entirely*, and modifies the subsequent remark. In Matthew it is thus:—"It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it unto the dogs." In Mark it is softened by the preliminary, "*Let the children first be filled,*" &c.

Matthew (xxiv. 20), "But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, *neither on the Sabbath day.*" Mark omits the last clause, which would have had no meaning for any but the Jews, whose Sabbath day's journey was by law restricted to a small distance.

In the promise given to the disciples, in answer to Peter's question, "Behold we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" The following verse, given by Matthew (xix. 28), *is omitted by Mark* (x. 28):—"Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit in the

throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

The Gospel of Luke, which is a work in some respects of more pretension, and unquestionably of more literary merit, than the two first, will require a few additional observations. The remarks we have made on the prophecies of his own sufferings and resurrection, alleged by Matthew and Mark to have been uttered by Jesus, apply equally to Luke's narrative, in which similar passages occur; and in these, therefore, we must admit that the third evangelist, like the other two, ascribed to Jesus discourses which never really proceeded from him. But besides these, there are several passages in Luke which bear an equally apocryphal character, some of which it will be interesting to notice.

The first chapter, from verse 5-80, contains the account of the annunciation and birth of John the Baptist, with all the marvellous circumstances attending it, and also the annunciation to Mary, and the miraculous conception of Jesus—an account exhibiting many remarkable discrepancies with the corresponding narrative in Matthew. We are spared the necessity of a detailed investigation of this chapter by the agreement of the most learned critics, both of the orthodox and sceptical schools, in considering the narrative as poetical and legendary.¹ It is examined at great length by Strauss, who is at the head of the most daring class of the Biblical Commentators of Germany, and by Schleiermacher, who ranks first among the learned divines of that country. The latter (in the work translated by one of our most erudite and liberal Prelates, and already often referred to), writes thus, pp. 25-7:—

"Thus, then, we begin by detaching the first chapter as an originally independent composition. If we consider it in this light somewhat more closely, we

¹ [The recent repudiation of the "Virgin-birth" by modern divines will be in the memory of all.]

cannot resist the impression that it was originally rather a little poetical work than a properly-historical narrative. The latter supposition, in its strictest sense at all events, no one will adopt, or contend that the angel Gabriel announced the advent of the Messiah in figures so purely Jewish, and in expressions taken mostly from the Old Testament; or that the alternate song between Elizabeth and Mary actually took place in the manner described; or that Zacharias, at the instant of recovering his speech, made use of it to utter the hymn, without being disturbed by the joy and surprise of the company, by which the narrator himself allows his description to be interrupted. At all events we should then be obliged to suppose that the author made additions of his own, and enriched the historical narrative by the lyrical effusions of his own genius." . . . "If we consider the whole grouping of the narrative, there naturally presents itself to us a pleasing little composition, completely in the style and manner of several Jewish poems, still extant among our apocryphal writings, written in all probability originally in Aramaic by a Christian of the more liberal Judaising school." . . . "There are many other statements which I should not venture to pronounce historical, but would rather explain by the occasion the poet had for them. To these belongs, in the first place, John's being a late-born child, which is evidently only imagined for the sake of analogy with several heroes of Hebrew antiquity; and, in the next place, the relation between the ages of John and Christ, and likewise the consanguinity of Mary and Elizabeth, which besides, it is difficult to reconcile with the assertion of John (John, i, 33), that he did not know Christ before his baptism."

In the second chapter we have the account of the birth of Jesus, and the accompanying apparition of a multitude of angels to shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem—as to the historical foundation of which Strauss and Schleierma-

cher are at variance; the former regarding it as wholly mythical, and the latter as based upon an actual occurrence, imperfectly remembered in after times, when the celebrity of Jesus caused every contribution to the history of his birth and infancy to be eagerly sought for. All that we can say on the subject with any certainty is, that the tone of the narrative is legendary. The poetical rhapsody of Simeon when Jesus was presented in the temple may be passed over with the same remark;—but the 33rd verse, where we are told that "Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him," proves clearly one of two things:—either the unhistorical character of the Song of Simeon, and of the consequent astonishment of the parents of Jesus—or the unreality of the miraculous annunciation and conception. It is impossible, if an angel had actually announced to Mary the birth of the divine child in the language, or in anything resembling the language, recorded in Luke i. 31-35; and if, in accordance with that announcement, Mary had found herself with child before she had any *natural* possibility of being so—that she should have felt any astonishment whatever at the prophetic announcement of Simeon, so consonant with the angelic promise, especially when occurring after the miraculous vision of the Shepherds, which, we are told, "she pondered in her heart." Schleiermacher has felt this difficulty, and endeavours to evade it by considering the first and second chapters to be two monographs originally by different hands, which Luke incorporated into his gospel. This was very probably the case; but it does not avoid the difficulty, as it involves giving up ii. 33 as an unauthorised and incorrect statement.

The genealogy of Jesus, as given in the third chapter, may be in the main correct, though there are some perplexities in one portion of it; but if the previous narrative be correct, it is not the genealogy of Jesus at all, but only of Joseph, who was no relation to him whatever, but simply his guardian. On the other

hand, if the preparer of the genealogy, or the evangelist who records it, knew or believed the story of the miraculous conception, we can conceive no reason for his admitting a pedigree which is either wholly meaningless, or destructive of his previous statements. The insertion in verse 23, "as was supposed," whether by the evangelist or a subsequent copyist, merely shows that whoever made it perceived the incongruity, but preferred neutralising the genealogy to omitting it.¹

In all the synoptical gospels we find instances of the cure of demoniacs by Jesus early in his career, in which the demons, promptly, spontaneously, and loudly, bear testimony to his Messiahship. These statements occur once in Matthew (viii. 29)—four times in Mark (i. 24, 34 ; iii. 11 ; v. 7) ; and three times in Luke (iv. 33, 41 ; viii. 28).² Now, two points are evident to common sense, and are fully admitted by honest criticism:—*first*, that these demoniacs were lunatic and epileptic patients ; and *secondly*, that Jesus (or the narrators who framed the language of Jesus throughout the synoptical gospels) shared the common belief that these maladies were caused by evil spirits inhabiting the bodies of the sufferers. We are then landed in this conclusion—certainly not a probable one, nor the one intended to be conveyed by the narrators—that the idea of Jesus being the Messiah was adopted by madmen before it had found entrance into the public mind, apparently even before it was received by his immediate disciples—was in fact first suggested by madmen ;—in other words, that it was an idea which originated with insane brains

¹ The whole story of the Incarnation, however, is effectually discredited by the fact that none of the Apostles or sacred Historians make any subsequent reference to it, or indicate any knowledge of it.

² It is worthy of remark that no narrative of the healing of demoniacs, stated as such, occurs in the fourth gospel. This would intimate it to be the work of a man who had outgrown, or had never entertained, the idea of maladies arising from possession. It is one of many indications in this evangelist of a Greek rather than a Jewish mind.

—which presented itself to, and found acceptance with, insane brains more readily than sane ones. The conception of the evangelists clearly was that Jesus derived honour (and his mission confirmation) from this early recognition of his Messianic character by hostile spirits of a superior order of Intelligences ; but to us, who know that these supposed superior Intelligences were really unhappy men whose natural intellect had been perverted or impaired, the effect of the narrative becomes absolutely reversed ;—and if they are to be accepted as historical, they lead inevitably to the conclusion that the idea of the Messiahship of Jesus was originally formed in disordered brains, and spread thence among the mass of the disciples. The only rescue from this conclusion lies in the admission, that these narratives are not historical, but mythic, and belong to that class of additions which early grew up in the Christian Church, out of the desire to honour and aggrandise the memory of its Founder, and which our uncritical evangelists embodied as they found them.

Passing over a few minor passages of doubtful authenticity or accuracy, we come to one near the close of the gospel, which we have no scruple in pronouncing to be an unwarranted interpolation. In xxii. 36-38, Jesus is reported, after the last Supper, to have said to his disciples, "He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one. And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said, It is enough." Christ never could have uttered such a command, nor, we should imagine, anything which could have been mistaken for it. The very idea is contradicted by his whole character, and utterly precluded by the narratives of the other evangelists ;—for when Peter did use the sword, he met with a severe rebuke from his Master :—"Put up thy sword into the sheath : the cup which my Father hath given me shall I not drink it ?"—according to John "Put up again thy sword into its place ; for all they that take the sword shall perish by

the sword,"—according to Matthew. The passage we conceive to be a clumsy invention of some early narrator, to account for the remarkable fact of Peter having a sword at the time of Christ's apprehension; and it is inconceivable to us how a sensible compiler like Luke could have admitted into his history such an apocryphal and unharmonising fragment.

In conclusion, then, it appears certain that in all the synoptical gospels we have events related which did not really occur,

and words ascribed to Jesus which Jesus did not utter; and that many of these words and events are of great significance. In the great majority of these instances, however, this incorrectness does not imply any want of honesty on the part of the Evangelists, but merely indicates that they adopted and embodied, without much scrutiny or critical acumen, whatever probable and honourable narratives they found current in the Christian community.

CHAPTER IX

SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED—GOSPEL OF JOHN

IN the examination of the fourth Gospel a different mode of criticism from that hitherto pursued is required. Here we do not find, so frequently as in the other Evangelists, particular passages which pronounce their own condemnation, by anachronisms, peculiarity of language, or incompatibility with others more obviously historical; but the whole tone of the delineations, the tenor of the discourses, and the general course of the narrative, are utterly different from those contained in the synoptical gospels, and also from what we should expect from a Jew speaking to Jews, writing of Jews, imbued with the spirit and living in the land of Judaism.

By the common admission of all recent critics, this gospel is rather to be regarded as a polemic, than an historic composition.¹ It was written less with the intention of giving a complete and continuous view of Christ's character and career, than to meet and confute certain heresies which had sprung up in the Christian church near the close of the first century, by selecting, from the

memory of the author, or the traditions then current among believers, such narratives and discourses as were conceived to be most opposed to the heresies in question. Now these heresies related almost exclusively to the person and nature of Jesus; on which points we have many indications that great difference of opinion existed, even during the apostolic period. The obnoxious doctrines especially pointed at in the gospel appear, both from internal evidence and external testimony,¹ to be those held by Cerinthus and the Nicolaitans, which, according to Hug, were as follows:—The one Eternal God is too pure, perfect, and pervading an essence to be able to operate on matter; but from him emanated a number of inferior and gradually degenerating spiritual natures, one of whom was the Creator of the world,—hence its imperfections. Jesus was simply and truly a man, though an eminently great and virtuous one; but one of the above spiritual

¹ See Hug, Strauss, Hennell, De Wette. Also Dr. Tait's "Suggestions."

¹ Irenæus, Jerome, Epiphanius. See Hug, § 51. See also a very detailed account of the Gnostics in Norton's "Genuineness of the Gospels," ii. c. 1, 2.

natures—the Christ, the Son of God—united itself to Jesus at his baptism, and thus conferred upon him superhuman power. “This Christ, as an immaterial Being of exalted origin, one of the purer kinds of spirits, was from his nature unsusceptible of material affections, of suffering and pain. He, therefore, at the commencement of the Passion, resumed his separate existence, abandoned Jesus to pain and death, and soared upwards to his native heaven. Cerinthus distinguished *Jesus* and *Christ*, *Jesus* and the *Son of God*, as beings of different nature and dignity.¹ The Nicolaitans held similar doctrines in regard to the Supreme Deity and his relation to mankind, and an inferior spirit who was the Creator of the world. Among the subaltern orders of spirits they considered the most distinguished to be the only-begotten, the *μονογενής* (whose existence, however, had a beginning), and the *λόγος*, the Word, who was an immediate descendant of the only-begotten.”²

These, then, were the opinions which the author of the fourth gospel wrote to controvert; in confirmation of which being his object we have his own statement (xx. 31): “These are written” (not that ye may know the life and understand the character of our great Teacher, but that ye may believe his nature to be what I affirm) “that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through his name.” Now, a narrative written with a controversial aim—a narrative, more especially, consisting of recollected or selected circumstances and discourses—carries within it, as everyone will admit, from the very nature of fallible humanity, an obvious element of inaccuracy. A man who *writes a history to prove a doctrine* must be something more than a man, if he writes that history with

a scrupulous fidelity of fact and colouring. Accordingly, we find that the public discourses of Jesus in this gospel turn almost exclusively upon the dignity of his own person, which topic is brought forward in a manner and with a frequency which it is impossible to regard as historical. The prominent feature in the character of Jesus, as here depicted, is an overweening tendency to self-glorification. We see no longer, as in the other gospels, a prophet eager to bring men to God, and to instruct them in righteousness, but one whose whole mind seems occupied with the grandeur of his own nature and mission. In the first three gospels we have the message; in the fourth we have comparatively little but the messenger. If any of our readers will peruse the gospel with this observation in their minds, we are persuaded the result will be a very strong and probably painful impression that they cannot here be dealing with the genuine language of Jesus, but simply with a composition arising out of deep conviction of his superior nature, left in the mind of the writer by the contemplation of his splendid genius and his noble and lovely character.

The difference of style and subject between the discourses of Jesus in the fourth gospel and in the synoptical ones has been much dwelt upon, and we think by no means too much, as proving the greater or less unauthenticity of the former. This objection has been met by the supposition that the finer intellect and more spiritual character of John induced him to select, and enabled him to record, the more subtle and speculative discourses of his Master, which were unacceptable or unintelligible to the more practical and homely minds of the other disciples; and reference is made to the parallel case of Xenophon and Plato, whose reports of the conversations of Socrates are so different in tone and matter as to render it very difficult to believe that both sat at the feet of the same master, and listened to the same teaching. But the citation

¹ Several critics contend that the original reading of 1 John iv. 3 was, “Every spirit that separateth Jesus (from the Christ) is not of God.”—See Hug. p. 423.

² Hug, § 51.

is an unfortunate one; for in this case, also, it is more than suspected that the more simple recorder was the more correct one, and that the sublimer and subtler peculiarities in the discourses reported by Plato belong rather to the disciple than to the teacher. Had John merely *superadded* some more refined and mystical discourses omitted by his predecessors, the supposition in question might have been admitted; but it is impossible not to perceive that here the *whole tone* of the mind delineated is new and discrepant, though often eminently beautiful.

Another argument, which may be considered as conclusive against the historical fidelity of the discourses of Jesus in the fourth gospel is, that not only they, but the discourses of John the Baptist likewise, are entirely in the style of the evangelist himself, where he introduces his own remarks, both in the gospel and in the first epistle. He makes both Jesus and the Baptist speak exactly as he himself speaks. Compare the following passages:—

John iii. 31-36. (Baptist loquitur.) He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony.

He that receiveth his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.

For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God; for God giveth not the spirit by measure.

The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.

John viii. 23. (Jesus loquitur.) Ye are from beneath, I am from above; ye are of this world; I am not of this world.

iii. 11. (Jesus loq.) We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our testimony.

viii. 26. (Jesus loq.) I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him.—(See also vii. 16-18; xiv. 24.)

v. 20. (Jesus loq.) The Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth.

xiii. 3. (Evangelist loq.) Jesus knowing

that the Father had given all things into his hands.

vi. 47. (Jesus loq.) He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

vi. 40. (Jesus loq.)

He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.—(See also I Epistle v. 10-13, and Gospel iii. 18, where the Evangelist or Jesus speaks.)

And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life.

Another indication that in a great part of the fourth gospel we have not the genuine discourses of Jesus, is found in the mystical and enigmatical nature of the language. This peculiarity, of which we have scarcely a trace in the other Evangelists, beyond the few parables which they did not at first understand, but which Jesus immediately explained to them, pervades the fourth gospel. The great Teacher is here represented as absolutely labouring to be unintelligible, to soar out of the reach of his hearers, and at once perplex and disgust them. "It is the constant method of this Evangelist, in detailing the conversation of Jesus, to form the knot and progress of the discussions, by making the interlocutors understand literally what Jesus intended figuratively. The type of the dialogue is that in which language intended spiritually is understood carnally." The instances of this are inconceivably frequent and unnatural. We have the conversation with the Jews about "the temple of his body" (ii. 21); the mystification of Nicodemus on the subject of regeneration (iii. 3-10); the conversation with the Samaritan woman (iv. 10-15); with his disciples about "the food which ye know not of" (iv. 32); with the people about the "bread from heaven" (vi. 31-35); with the Jews about giving them his flesh to eat (vi. 48-66); with the Pharisees about his disappearance (vii. 33-39, and viii. 21,

22); again about his heavenly origin and pre-existence (viii. 37, 34, and 56-58); and with his disciples about the sleep of Lazarus (xi. 11-14). Now, in the first place, it is very improbable that Jesus, who came to preach the gospel to the poor, should so constantly have spoken in a style which his hearers could not understand; and in the next place, it is equally improbable that an Oriental people, so accustomed to figurative language,¹ and whose literature was so eminently metaphorical, should have misapprehended the words of Jesus so stupidly and so incessantly as the Evangelist represents them to have done.

But perhaps the most conclusive argument against the historical character of the discourses in the fourth gospel is to be found in the fact that, whether dialogues or monologues, they are complete and continuous, resembling compositions rather than recollections, and of a length which it is next to impossible could have been accurately retained—even if we adopt Bertholdt's improbable hypothesis, that the apostle took notes of Jesus' discourses at the time of their delivery. Notwithstanding all that has been said as to the possible extent to which the powers of memory may go, it is difficult for an unprepossessed mind to believe that discourses such as that contained in the 14th, 15th, and 16th chapters could have been accurately retained and reported unless by a shorthand writer, or by one favoured with supernatural assistance. "We hold it therefore to be established" (says Strauss,² and in the main we agree with him) "that the discourses of Jesus in the fourth gospel are mainly free compositions of the Evangelist; but we have admitted that he has culled several sayings of Jesus

from an authentic tradition, and hence we do not extend this proposition to those passages which are countenanced by parallels in the synoptical gospels. In these latter compilations we have an example of the vicissitudes which befall discourses that are preserved only in the memory of a second party. Severed from their original connection, and broken up into smaller and smaller fragments, they present, when reassembled, the appearance of a mosaic, in which the connection of the parts is a purely external one, and every transition an artificial juncture. The discourses in John present just the opposite appearance. Their gradual transitions, only occasionally rendered obscure by the mystical depths of meaning in which they lie—transitions in which one thought develops itself out of another, and a succeeding proposition is frequently but an explanatory amplification of the preceding one—are indicative of a pliable, unresisting mass, such as is never presented to a writer by the traditional sayings of another, but by such only as proceeds from the stores of his own thought, which he moulds according to his will. For this reason the contributions of tradition to these stores of thought were not so likely to have been *particular independent sayings of Jesus, as rather certain ideas which formed the basis of many of his discourses*, and which were modified and developed according to the bent of a mind of Greek or Alexandrian culture."¹

Another peculiarity of this gospel—arising, probably, out of its controversial origin—is its exaltation of dogma over morality—of belief over spiritual affection.

¹ See the remarks of Strauss on the conversation with Nicodemus, from which it appears that the image of a new birth was a current one among the Jews, and *could not* have been so misunderstood by a master in Israel, and in fact that the whole conversation is almost certainly fictitious.—ii. 153.

² "Leben Jesu," ii. 187.

¹ See also Hennell, p. 200. "The picture of Jesus bequeathing his parting benedictions to the disciples, seems fully to warrant the idea that the author was one whose imagination and affections had received an impress from real scenes and real attachments. The few relics of the words, looks, and acts of Jesus, which friendship itself could at that time preserve unmixed, he expands into a complete record of his own and the disciples' sentiments; what they felt, he makes Jesus speak."

In the other gospels, piety, charity, forgiveness of injuries, purity of life, are preached by Christ as the titles to his kingdom and his Father's favour. Whereas, in John's gospel, as in his epistles, belief in Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah, the Logos—belief, in fact, in the evangelist's view of his nature—is constantly represented as the one thing needful. The whole tone of the history bears token of a time when the message was beginning to be forgotten in the Messenger; when metaphysical and fruitless discussions as to the nature of Christ had superseded devotion to his spirit, and attention to the sublime piety and simple self-sacrificing holiness which formed the essence of his own teaching. The discourses are often touchingly eloquent and tender, the narrative is full of beauty, pathos, and nature; but we miss the simple and intelligible truth, the noble, yet practicable, morality of the other histories; we find in it more of Christ than of Christianity, and more of John than of Jesus. If the work of an apostle at all, it was of an apostle who had caught but a fragment of his Master's mantle, or in whom the good original seed had been choked by the long bad habit of subtle and scholastic controversies. We cannot but regard this gospel as decidedly inferior in moral sublimity and purity to the other representations of Christ's teaching which have come down to us; its religion is more of a dogmatic creed, and its very philanthropy has a narrower and more restricted character.

There are several minor peculiarities which distinguish this gospel from the preceding ones, which we can do no more than indicate. We find here little about the Kingdom of Heaven—nothing about Christ's mission being confined to the Israelites—nothing about the casting out of devils—nothing about the destruction of Jerusalem—nothing about the struggle between the law and gospel—topics which occupy so large a space in the picture of Christ's ministry given in the synoptical gospels; and the omission of

which seems to refer the composition of this narrative to a later period, when the Gentiles were admitted into the Church—when the idea of demoniacal possession had given way before a higher culture—when Jerusalem had been long destroyed—and when Judaism had quite retired before Christianity, at least within the pale of the Church.¹

¹ Modern criticism has detected several slight errors and inaccuracies in the fourth gospel, such as Sychar for Sichem, Siloam erroneously interpreted *sent*, &c., &c., from which it has been argued that the writer could not have been a native of Palestine, and by consequence not the Apostle John.

These, however, are insignificant in comparison with the discrepancy as to the date of the Last Supper in the different Evangelists, the Synoptists fixing it on the Feast of the Passover and the Fourth Gospel on the previous day. This discrepancy gave rise to the famous "Quartodeciman Controversy," as it is called, which so long agitated the early Church, and was at last only quelled by an authoritative decree of the Emperor Constantine. Those who wish to understand the question, and the light which its details throw upon the probable authorship of the fourth Gospel, will find an exhaustive account in Section ix. of Mr. Tayler's learned inquiry already referred to.—The remarkable points are that the early controversialists, who took the view and held to the practice of the Synoptists, appealed to *the Apostle John* as their strongest authority on their side;—while it was not till very late in the discussion that their adversaries seem to have thought of quoting the fourth Gospel in *their* favour;—that this Gospel entirely ignores the institution of the Eucharist in its account of the last days of Jesus, though apparently alluding to it in some earlier chapters;—and that the object of the author appears to have been to represent, by implication at least, Christ as *being* himself the Paschal Lamb, not as partaking of it.

If the fourth gospel were really the work of the Apostle John, it would seem impossible to avoid the inference that the institution of "the Sacrament" of bread and wine as recorded by the other Evangelists is entirely unhistorical, and then all the stupendous ecclesiastical corollaries flowing from it fall to the ground. It is impossible that John could have *forgotten* such commands or assertions as are supposed to be involved in the words, "Take eat; this is my body," &c.—It is equally impossible that, if they were ever spoken, and signified what Christians in general believe to be their significance, the disciple who leaned on the bosom of Jesus while they were uttered could have so under-valued their meaning as to have omitted to record them. The dilemma, then, seems to

Though we have seen ample reason to conclude that nearly all the discourses of Jesus in the fourth gospel are mainly the composition of the evangelist from memory or tradition, rather than the genuine utterances of our great Teacher, it may be satisfactory, as further confirmation, to select a few single passages and expressions, as to the unauthentic character of which there can be no question. Thus at ch. iii. 11, Jesus is represented as saying to Nicodemus, in the midst of his discourse about regeneration, "We speak that we do know, and testify that which we have seen; and ye receive not our witness,"—expressions wholly unmeaning and out of place in the mouth of Jesus on an occasion where he is testifying nothing at all, but merely propounding a mystical dogma to an auditor dull of comprehension—but expressions which are the evangelist's habitual form of asseveration and complaint.

It is not clear whether the writer intended verses 16–21 to form part of the discourse of Jesus, or merely a commentary of his own. If the former, they are clearly unwarrantable; their point of view is that of a period when the teaching of Christ had been known and rejected, and they could not have been uttered with any justice or appropriateness at the very commencement of his ministry.

Ch. xi. 8. "His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee: and goest thou thither again?" *The Jews* is an expression which would be natural to Ephesians or other foreigners when speaking of the inhabitants of Palestine, but could not have been used by Jews speaking of

be inescapable:—*Either* John did not write the fourth Gospel—in which case we have the direct testimony of no eye-witness to the facts and sayings of Christ's ministry;—*Or* the Sacrament of the Lord's supper, as deduced from the Synoptical accounts, with the special doctrines of Sacramental grace to partakers of it, and of the Atonement (as far as it is warranted or originally was suggested by those words of Christ), becomes "the baseless fabric of a vision."

their own countrymen. They would have said, the People, or, the Pharisees. The same observation applies to xiii. 33, and also probably to xviii. 36.

Ch. xvii. 3. "And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and *Jesus Christ* whom Thou hast sent." This would be a natural expression for the evangelist, but scarcely for his Master.

As before observed, great doubt hangs over the whole story of the testimony borne by the Baptist to Jesus at his baptism. In the fourth evangelist, this testimony is represented as most emphatic, public, and repeated—so that it could have left no doubt in the minds of any of his followers, either as to the grandeur of the mission of Jesus, or as to his own subordinate character and position (i. 29–36; iii. 26–36). Yet we find, from Acts xviii. 25, and again xix. 3, circles of John the Baptist's disciples, who appear never even to have heard of Jesus—a statement which we think is justly held irreconcilable with the statements above referred to in the fourth gospel.

The question of miracles will be considered in a future chapter, and several of those related in this Gospel—significantly *seven* in number, and in culminating order—have special characteristics of their own; but there is one miracle, peculiar to John, of so singular and apocryphal a character as to call for notice here. The turning of water into wine at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee has long formed the opprobrium and perplexity of theologians, and must continue to do so as long as they persist in regarding it as an accurate historical relation. None of the numberless attempts to give anything like a probable explanation of the narrative has been attended with the least success. They are for the most part melancholy specimens of ingenuity misapplied, and plain honesty perverted by an originally false assumption. No portion of the gospel history, scarcely any portion of Old Testament, or even of apocryphal,

narratives, bears such unmistakable marks of fiction. It is a story which, if found in any other volume, would at once have been dismissed as a clumsy and manifest invention. In the first place, it is a miracle wrought to supply more wine to men who had already drunk much—a deed which has no suitability to the character of Jesus, and no analogy to any other of his miracles. *Secondly*, though it was, as we are told, the first of his miracles, his mother is represented as expecting him to work a miracle, and to commence his public career with so unfit and improbable a one. *Thirdly*, Jesus is said to have spoken harshly¹ to his mother, asking her what they had in common, and telling her that “his hour (for working miracles) was not yet come,” when he

knew that it *was* come. *Fourthly*, in spite of this rebuff, Mary is represented as still expecting a miracle, and *this particular one*, and as making preparation for it: “She saith to the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it”; and accordingly Jesus immediately began to give orders to them. *Fifthly*, the superior quality of the wine, and the enormous quantity produced (135 gallons, or in our language, above 43 dozen¹) are obviously fabulous. And those who are familiar with the apocryphal gospels will have no difficulty in recognising the close consanguinity between the whole narrative and the stories of miracles with which they abound. It is perfectly hopeless, as well as mischievous, to endeavour to retain it as a portion of authentic history.

CHAPTER X

RESULTS OF THE FOREGOING CRITICISM

THE conclusion at which we have arrived in the foregoing chapters is of vital moment, and deserves to be fully developed. When duly wrought out, it will be found the means of extricating Religion from Orthodoxy—of rescuing Christianity from Calvinism. We have seen that the Gospels, while they give a fair and faithful outline of Christ's character and teaching (the Synoptical gospels at least) fill up that outline with much that is not authentic; that many of the statements therein related are not historical, but mystical or legendary; and that portions at least of the language ascribed to Jesus were never uttered by him, but originated either with the Evangelists themselves, or more frequently in the traditional stores from which they drew their materials.

¹ All attempts at explanation have failed to remove this character from the expression—*ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ καιρὸς σοι*.

We cannot, indeed, say in all cases, nor even in most cases, *with certainty*—in many we cannot even pronounce with any very strong *probability*—that such and such particular expressions or discourses are, or are not, the genuine utterances of Christ. With respect to some, we can say with confidence that they are *not* from him; with respect to others, we can say with almost equal confidence that they are his actual words; but with regard to the majority of passages this certainty is not attainable. But as we *know* that much did not proceed from Jesus—that much is unhistorical and ungentle—we are entitled

¹ See the calculation in Hennell, and in Strauss, ii. 432. The *μετρητής* is supposed to correspond to the Hebrew *bat*, which was equal to $1\frac{1}{2}$ Roman amphora, or 8·7 gallons; the whole quantity would therefore be from 104 to 156 gallons.

to conclude—we are even *forced*, by the very instinct of our reasoning faculty, to conclude that the unhistorical and un-genuine passages are those in which Jesus is represented as speaking and acting in a manner uncomformable to his character as otherwise delineated, irreconcilable with the tenour of his teaching as elsewhere described, and at variance with those grand moral and spiritual truths which have commanded the assent of all disciplined and comprehensive minds, and which could scarcely have escaped an intellect so just, wide, penetrating, and profound as that of our great Teacher.

Most reflecting minds rise from a perusal of the gospel history with a clear, broad, vivid conception of the character and mission of Christ, notwithstanding the many passages at which they have stumbled, and which they have felt—perhaps with needless alarm and self-reproach—to be incongruous and unharmonising with the great whole. The question naturally arises, Did these incongruities and inconsistencies really exist in Christ himself? or, are they the result of the imperfect and unhistorical condition in which his biography has been transmitted to us? The answer, it seems to us, ought to be this:—We cannot *prove*, it is true, that some of these unsuitabilities did not exist in Christ himself, but we have shown that many of them belong to the history, not to the subject of the history, and it is only fair, therefore, in the absence of contrary evidence, to conclude that the others also are due to the same origin.

Now the peculiar, startling, perplexing, revolting, and contradictory doctrines of modern orthodoxy—so far as they have originated from or are justified by the gospels at all—have originated from, or are justified by, not the general tenour of Christ's character and preaching, *but those single unharmonising, discrepant, texts of which we have been speaking. Doctrines, which unsophisticated men feel to be inadmissible and repellent and which those who hold them most*

devotedly secretly admit to be fearful and perplexing, are founded on particular passages which contradict the *generality* of Christ's teaching, but which, being attributed to him by the evangelists, have been regarded as endowed with an authority which it would be profane and dangerous to resist. In showing, therefore, that several of these passages did not emanate from Christ, and that in all probability none of them did, we conceive that we shall have rendered a vast service to the cause of true religion, and to those numerous individuals in whose tortured minds sense and conscience have long struggled for the mastery. We will elucidate this matter by a few specifications.¹

One of the most untenable, unphilosophical, uncharitable doctrines of the orthodox creed—one most peculiarly stamped with the impress of the bad passions of humanity—is, that *belief* (by which is generally signified belief in Jesus as the Son of God, the promised Messiah, a Teacher sent down from Heaven on a special mission to redeem mankind) is *essential*, and *the one thing essential, to Salvation*. The source of this doctrine must doubtless be sought for in that intolerance of opposition unhappily so common among men, and in that tendency to ascribe bad motives to those who arrive at different conclusions from themselves, which prevails so generally among unchastened minds. But it cannot be denied that the gospels contain many texts which clearly affirm or fully imply a doctrine so untenable and harsh. Let us turn to a few of these and inquire into the degree of authenticity to which they are probably entitled.

The most specific assertion of the

¹ It is true that many of the doctrines in question had not a scriptural origin at all, but an ecclesiastical one; and, when originated, were defended by texts from the *epistles*, rather than the *gospels*. The authority of the epistles we shall consider in a subsequent chapter, but if in the meantime we can show that those doctrines have no foundation in the language of Christ, the *chief* obstacle to the renunciation of them is removed.

tenet in question, couched in that positive, terse, sententious damnatory language so dear to orthodox divines, is *found in the spurious portion of the gospel of Mark* (c. xvi. 16),¹ and is there by the writer, whoever he was, unscrupulously put into the mouth of Jesus after his resurrection. In the synoptical gospels may be found a few texts which may be wrested to support the doctrine, but there are none which teach it. But when we come to the fourth gospel we find several passages similar to that in Mark,² proclaiming Salvation to believers, *but all in the peculiar style and spirit of the author of the first Epistle of John*, which abounds in denunciations precisely similar³ (but directed, it is remarkable, apparently against heretics, not against infidels, against those who believe amiss, not against those who do not believe at all)—all, too, redolent of the temper of that Apostle who wished to call down fire from heaven on an unbelieving village, and *who was rebuked by Jesus for the savage and presumptuous suggestion*.

In the last chapter we have shown that the *style* of these passages is of a nature to point to John, and not to Jesus, as their author, and that the *spirit* of them is entirely hostile and incompatible with the language of Jesus in other parts more obviously faithful. It appears, therefore, that the passages confirmatory of the doctrine in question are found exclusively in a portion of the synoptists which is certainly spurious, and in portions of the fourth gospel which are almost certainly unhistorical; and that they are contradicted by other passages in all the gospels. It only remains to show that as the doctrine is at variance with the spirit of the mild

and benevolent Jesus, so it is too obviously unsound not to have been recognised as such by one whose clear and grand intelligence was informed and enlightened by so pure a heart.

In the first place, Christ must have known that the same doctrine will be presented in a very different manner, and with very different degrees of evidence for its truth, by different preachers; so much so that to *resist* the arguments of one preacher would imply either dulness of comprehension or obstinate and wilful blindness, while to *yield* to the arguments of his colleague would imply weakness of understanding or instability of purpose. The same doctrine may be presented and defended by one preacher so clearly, rationally, and forcibly that all sensible men (idiosyncrasies apart) must accept it, and by another preacher so feebly, corruptly, and confusedly, that all sensible men must reject it. The rejection of the Christianity preached by Luther, and of the Christianity preached by Tetzels, of the Christianity preached by Loyola and Dunstan, and of the Christianity preached by Oberlin and Pascal, cannot be worthy of the same condemnation. Few Protestants, and no Catholics, will deny that Christianity *has been* so presented to men as to make it a simple affair both of sense and virtue to reject it. To represent, therefore, the reception of a doctrine as a matter of merit, or its rejection as a matter of blame, *without reference to the consideration how and by whom it is preached*, is to leave out the main element of judgment—an error which could not have been committed by the just and wise Jesus.

Further. The doctrine and the passages in question ascribe to "belief" the highest degree of merit, and the sublimest conceivable reward—"eternal life"; and to "disbelief," the deepest wickedness, and the most fearful penalty, "damnation," and "the wrath of God." Now, here we have a logical error, betraying a confusion of intellect which

¹ "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned," a passage which, were it not happily spurious, would suffice to "damn" the book which contains it.

² John iii. 16, 18, 36; v. 24; vi. 29, 40, 47; xi. 25, 26; xx. 31.

³ I John ii. 19, 22, 23; iv. 2, 3, 6, 15; v. 1, 5, 10, 12, 13.

we may well scruple to ascribe to Jesus. Belief is an effect produced by a cause. It is a condition of the mind induced by the operation of evidence presented. Being, therefore, an *effect*, and not an *act*, it cannot be, or have, a merit. The moment it becomes a distinctly voluntary act (*and therefore a thing of which merit can be predicated*) it ceases to be genuine—it is then brought about (if it be not an abuse of language to name this state "belief") by the will of the individual, not by the *bonâ fide* operation of evidence upon his mind—which brings us to the *reductio ad absurdum*, that belief can only become meritorious by ceasing to be honest.

In sane and competent minds, if the evidence presented is sufficient, belief will follow as a necessary consequence—if it does not follow, this can only arise from the evidence adduced being insufficient—and in such case to pretend belief, or to attempt belief, would be a forfeiture of mental integrity; and cannot therefore be meritorious, but the reverse. To disbelieve, in spite of adequate proof is impossible—to believe without adequate proof is weak or dishonest. Belief, therefore, can only become meritorious by becoming sinful—can only become a fit subject for reward by becoming a fit subject for punishment. Such is the sophism involved in the dogma which theologians have dared to put into Christ's mouth, and to announce on his authority.

But, it will be urged, the disbelief which Christ blamed and menaced with punishment was (as appears from John iii. 19) the disbelief implied in a wilful rejection of his claims, or a refusal to examine them—a love of darkness in preference to light. If so, the language employed is incorrect and deceptive, and the blame is predicated of an effect instead of a cause—it is *meant* of a voluntary action, but it is *predicated* of a specified and denounced consequence which is no natural or logical indication of that voluntary action, but may arise from independent causes. The moralist

who should denounce gout as a sin, meaning the sinfulness to apply to the excesses of which gout is *often, but by no means always*, a consequence and an indication, would be held to be a very confused teacher and inaccurate logician. Moreover, this is not the sense attached to the doctrine by orthodox divines in common parlance. And the fact still remains that Christ is represented as rewarding by eternal felicity a state of mind which, *if honestly attained*, is inevitable, involuntary, and therefore in no way a fitting subject for reward, and which, if not honestly attained, is hollow, fallacious, and deserving of punishment rather than of recompense.

We are aware that the orthodox seek to escape from the dilemma, by asserting that belief results from the state of the heart, and that if this be right belief will inevitably follow. This is simply false in fact. How many excellent, virtuous, and humble minds, in all ages, have been *anxious* but unable to believe—have prayed earnestly for belief, and suffered bitterly for disbelief—in vain!

The dogma of the Divinity, or, as it is called in the technical language of polemics, *the proper Deity*, of Christ, though historically provable to have had an ecclesiastical, not an evangelical, origin¹—though clearly negated by the whole tenour of the synoptical gospels, and even by some passages in the fourth gospel [and though it is difficult to read the narrative of his career with an unforestalled mind without being clear that Jesus had no notion of such a belief himself, and would have repudiated it with horror]—can yet appeal to several isolated portions and texts, as suggesting and confirming, if not asserting it. On close examination, however, it will be seen that all these passages are to be found either in the fourth gospel—which we have already shown reason to conclude is throughout an unscrupulous and

¹ "The Unscriptural Origin and Ecclesiastical History of the Doctrine of the Trinity," by the Rev. J. Hamilton Thom.

most inexact paraphrase of Christ's teaching—or in those portions of the first three gospels which, on other accounts and from independent trains of argument, have been selected as at least of questionable authenticity. It is true that the doctrine in question is now chiefly defended by reference to the Epistles; but at the same time it would scarcely be held so tenaciously by the orthodox if it were found to be wholly destitute of *evangelical* support. Now, the passages which appear most confirmatory of Christ's Deity, or Divine Nature, are, in the first place, the narratives of the Incarnation, or the miraculous Conception, as given by Matthew and Luke. We have already entered pretty fully into the consideration of the authenticity of these portions of Scripture, and have seen that we may almost with certainty pronounce them to be fabulous, or mythical. The two narratives do not harmonise with each other; they neutralise and negative the genealogies on which depended so large a portion of the proof of Jesus being the Messiah;¹—the marvellous statement they contain is not referred to in any subsequent portion of the two gospels, and is tacitly but positively negatived by several passages—it is never mentioned in the Acts or in the Epistles, and was evidently unknown to all the Apostles—and, finally, the tone of the narrative, especially in Luke, is poetical and legendary, and bears a marked similarity to the stories contained in the apocryphal gospels.

The only other expressions in the first three gospels which lend the slightest countenance to the doctrine in question are the acknowledgments of the disciples, the centurion, and the demoniacs that Jesus was the Son of God,²—some

of which we have already shown to be of very questionable genuineness,—and the voice from heaven said to have been heard at the baptism and the transfiguration, saying, "This is my beloved Son," &c. But, besides that, as shown in chapter vi., considerable doubt rests on the accuracy of the first of these relations: the testimony borne by the heavenly voice to Jesus can in no sense mean that he was *physically* the Son of God, or a partaker of the divine nature, inasmuch as the very same expression was frequently applied to others, and as indeed a "Son of God" was, in the common parlance of the Jews, simply a prophet, a man whom God had sent, or to whom he had spoken.¹

But when we come to the fourth gospel, especially to those portions of it whose peculiar style betrays that they came from John, and not from Jesus, the case is very different. We find here many passages evidently intended to convey the impression that Jesus was endowed with a superhuman nature, but nearly all expressed in language savouring less of Christian simplicity than of Alexandrian philosophy. The Evangelist commences his gospel with a confused statement of the Platonic doctrine as modified in Alexandria, and that the Logos was a partaker of the Divine Nature, and was the Creator of the world; on which he proceeds to engraft his own notion, that Jesus was this Logos—that the Logos or the divine wisdom, the second person in Plato's Trinity, became flesh in the person of the Prophet of Nazareth. Now, can anyone read the epistles, or the first three gospels—or even the whole of the fourth—and not at once repudiate the notion that Jesus was, and knew himself to be, the Creator of the World?—which John

¹ The Messiah must, according to Jewish prophecy, be a lineal descendant of David: this Christ was, according to the genealogies; this he was not, if the miraculous conception be a fact. If, therefore, Jesus came into being as Matthew and Luke affirm, we do not see how he could have been the Messiah.

² An expression here merely signifying a prophet or the Messiah.

¹ "The Lord hath said unto me [David], Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee."—(Ps. ii. 7.) Jehovah says of Solomon, "I will be his father, and he shall be my son."—(2 Sam. vii. 14.) The same expression is applied to Israel (Exod. iv. 22, Hos. xi. 1), and to David (Ps. lxxxix. 27). "I have said, Ye are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High."—(Ps. lxxxii. 6.)

affirms him to have been. Throughout this gospel we find constant repetitions of the same endeavour to make out a superhuman nature for Christ; but the unguineness of these passages has already been fully considered.

Take, again, the doctrine of the Eternity of future punishments—the most *impossible* of the tenets included in the popular creed. It rests upon and is affirmed by one single Gospel text, Matt. xxv. 46;—for, though “hell fire,” “everlasting fire”—*i.e.*, the fire that was kept perpetually burning in the adjacent valley of Gehenna for the consumption of the city refuse—is often spoken of as typifying the fate of the wicked, yet the expression distinctly implies, not everlasting life in fire, *but the precise opposite*,—namely, *death*, annihilation, total destruction, in a fire ever at hand and never extinguished. The doctrine is not only in diametric antagonism to all that we can conceive or accept of the attributes of the God of Jesus, but to the whole spirit and teaching of our great Master. It is at variance with other texts and with the general view¹ gathered from authentic Scripture, which teaches the “perishing,” the “death” of the wicked, not their everlasting life in torment. And finally, the isolated text in question occurs in one only of the gospels,—and occurs there (as will be seen by comparing Matt. xxv. 31 with xxiv. 30) in immediate connection with the prophecy as to the coming of the end of the world within the lifetime of the then existing generation,—a prophecy the erroneousness of which is now demonstrated, and which there is (to say the least) no need for believing ever to have come out of the mouth of Christ. What are called the “eschatological” discourses are notoriously among the passages in the gospels of most questionable genuineness.

¹ See countless arguments from the pens, not of unbelievers, but of qualified divines—among later ones, “Harmony of Scripture on Future Punishments,” by the Rev. S. Minton, and a paper by “Anglicanus” in the *Contemporary Review* for May, 1872.

Yet it is on the authority of a single verse, so suspiciously located, so repeatedly contradicted elsewhere either distinctly or by implication, and so flagrantly out of harmony with the spirit both of Theism and of Christianity, that we are summoned to accept a dogma revolting alike to our purer instincts and our saner reason!

Once more: the doctrine of the Atonement, of Christ's death having been a sacrifice in expiation of the sins of mankind, is the keystone of the common form of modern orthodoxy. It takes its origin from the epistles, and we believe can only appeal to *three* texts in the Evangelists for even partial confirmation. In Matt. xx. 28 it is said: “The Son of man came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many,”—an expression which may *countenance* the doctrine, but assuredly does not contain it. Again, in Matt. xxvi. 28 we find: “This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many *for the remission of sins.*” Mark (xiv. 24) and Luke (xxi. 20), however, who gave the same sentence, *both omit the significant expression*; while John omits, not only the expression, but the entire narrative of the institution of the Eucharist, which is said elsewhere to have been the occasion of it. In the fourth gospel, John the Baptist is represented as saying of Jesus (i. 29), “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,” an expression which may possibly be intended to convey the doctrine, but which occurs in what we have already shown to be about the most apocryphal portion of the whole gospel.

In fine, then, we arrive at this irresistible conclusion; that—knowing several passages in the Evangelists to be unauthentic, and having reason to suspect the authenticity of many others, and scarcely being able with absolute certainty to point to any which are perfectly and indubitably authentic—the probability in favour of the fidelity of any of

the texts relied on to prove the peculiar and perplexing doctrines of modern orthodoxy, is far inferior to the probability *against* the truth of those doctrines. A doctrine perplexing to our reason and painful to our feelings *may* be from God; but in this case the proof of its being from God must be proportionally clear and irrefragable; the assertion of it in a narrative which does not scruple to attribute to God's messenger words which he never uttered, is not only no proof, but scarcely even amounts to a presumption. There is no text in the Evangelists, the divine (or Christian) origin of which is sufficiently unquestionable to enable it to serve as the foundation of doctrines repugnant to natural feeling or to common sense.

But, it will be objected, if these conclusions are sound, absolute uncertainty is thrown over the whole gospel history, and all over Christ's teaching. To this we reply, *in limine*, in the language of Algernon Sydney, "No consequence can destroy any truth"; the sole matter for consideration is, Are our arguments correct? not, Do they lead to a result which is embarrassing and unwelcome?

But the inference is excessive; the premises do not reach so far. The uncertainty thrown is not over the main

points of Christ's history, which, after all its retrenchments, still stands out an intelligible though a skeleton account—not over the grand features, the pervading tone, of his doctrines, or his character, which still present to us a clear, consistent, and splendid delineation; but over those individual statements, passages, and discourses which mar this delineation, which break its unity, which destroy its consistency, which cloud its clearness, which tarnish its beauty. The gain to us seems immense. It is true, we have no longer *absolute* certainty with regard to any one especial text or scene: such is neither necessary nor attainable; it is true that, instead of passively accepting the whole heterogeneous and indigestible mass, we must, by the careful and conscientious exercise of those faculties with which we are endowed, by ratiocination and moral tact, separate what Christ did from what he did not teach, as best we may. But the task will be difficult to those only who look in the gospels for a minute, dogmatic, and sententious creed—not to those who seek only to learn Christ's spirit, that they may imbibe it, and to comprehend his views of virtue and of God, that they may draw strength and consolation from those fountains of living water.¹

CHAPTER XI

RESURRECTION OF JESUS

WE are now arrived at the most vitally important, and the most intensely interesting, portion of the Christian records—the Resurrection of Jesus. This is the great fact to which the affections of Christians turn with the most cherished eagerness, the grand foundation on which their hopes depend, on which their faith is fixed. If, in consequence of our inquiries, the ordinary doctrine of Scriptural Inspiration be relinquished,

we have reason to rejoice that Religion is relieved from a burden often too great for it to bear. If the complete verbal accuracy of the Gospel narratives is dis-

¹ "The character of the record is such that I see not how any great stress can be laid on particular actions attributed to Jesus. That he lived a divine life, suffered a violent death, taught and lived a most beautiful religion—this seems the great fact about which a mass of truth and error has been collected."—Theodore Parker, "Discourse," p. 188.

proved, orthodoxy and not Christianity is a sufferer by the change, since it is only the more minute and embarrassing tenets of our creed that find their foundation swept away. If investigation shows the miracles of the Bible to be untenable, or at least unobligatory upon our belief, theologians are comforted by feeling that they have one weak and vulnerable outpost the less to defend. But if the resurrection of our Lord should prove, on closer scrutiny, to rest on no adequate evidence, and mental integrity should compel us to expunge it from our creed, the generality of Christians will feel that the whole basis of their faith and hope is gone, and their Christianity will vanish with the foundation on which, perhaps half-unconsciously, they rested it. Whether this ought to be so is a point for future consideration. All that we have now to do is to remember that truth must be investigated without any side-glance to the consequences which that investigation may have upon our hopes. Our faith is sure to fail us in the hour of trial if we have based it on consciously or suspectedly fallacious grounds, and maintained it by wilfully closing our eyes to the flaws in its foundations.

The belief in the resurrection of our Lord, when based upon reflection at all, and not a mere mental habit, will be found to rest on two grounds: *first*, the direct testimony of the Scripture narratives; and *secondly*, the evidence derivable from the subsequent conduct of the Apostles.

I. The narratives of the resurrection contained in the four Gospels present many remarkable discrepancies. But discrepancies in the accounts of an event given by different narrators, whether themselves witnesses, or merely historians, by no means necessarily impugn the reality of the event narrated, but simply those *accessories* of the event to which the discrepancies relate. Thus, when one Evangelist tells us that the two malefactors, who were crucified along with Jesus, reviled him, and another Evan-

list relates that only one of them reviled him, and was rebuked by the other for so doing, though the contradiction is direct and positive, no one feels that the least doubt is thereby thrown upon the fact of two malefactors having been crucified with Jesus, nor of some reviling having passed on the occasion. Therefore the variations in the narratives of the resurrection given by the four Evangelists do not, of themselves, impugn the fact of the resurrection. Even were they (which they are not) the first-hand accounts of eye-witnesses, instead of being merely derived from such, still it is characteristic of the honest testimony of eye-witnesses to be discrepant in collateral minutiae. But, on a closer examination of these accounts, several peculiarities present themselves for more detailed consideration.

1. We have already seen reason for concluding that, of the four Gospels, three at least were certainly not the production of eye-witnesses, but were compilations from oral or documentary narratives current among the Christian community at the time of their composition, and derived doubtless for the most part from very high authority. With regard to the fourth Gospel the opinions of the best critics are so much divided, that all we can pronounce upon the subject with any certainty is, that if it were the production of the Apostle John, it was written at a time when, either from defect of memory, redundancy of imagination, or laxity in his notions of an historian's duty, he allowed himself to take strange liberties with fact.¹ All, therefore, that the Gospels now present to us is the narrative of the Resurrection, not as it actually occurred, but in the form it had assumed among the disciples thirty years or more after the death of Jesus.

Now, the discrepancies which we notice in the various accounts are not greater than might have been expected in historians recording an event, or rather traditions of an event, which oc-

¹ See chap. ix.

curred from thirty to sixty years before they wrote. These records, therefore, discrepant as they are, are, we think, quite sufficient to prove that *something of the kind* occurred, *i.e.*, that some occurrence took place which gave rise to the belief and traditions ;—but no more. The agreement of the several accounts shows that something of the kind occurred :—their discrepancies show that this occurrence was not exactly such as it is related to have been.

Something of the kind occurred which formed the groundwork for the belief and the narrative. What, then, was this something—this basis—this nucleus of fact? The Gospel of Mark appears to contain this nucleus, and this alone.¹ It contains nothing but what all the other accounts contain, and nothing that is not simple, credible, and natural, but it contains enough to have formed a foundation for the whole subsequent superstructure. Mark informs us that when the women went early to the Sepulchre, they found it open, the body of Jesus gone, and someone in white garments who assured them that he was risen. *This all the four narratives agree in :—and they agree in nothing else.* The disappearance of the body, then, was certain ;—the information that Jesus was risen came from the women alone, who believed it because *they were told it*, and who were also the first to affirm that they had seen their Lord. In the excited state of mind in which all the disciples must have been at this time, were not these three unquestioned circumstances—that the body was gone ;—that a figure dressed in white told the women that their Lord was risen ;—and that the same women saw *someone whom they believed to be him* ;—amply sufficient to make a belief in his resurrection spread with the force and rapidity of a contagion?

¹ We must bear in mind that the *genuine* Gospel of Mark ends with the 8th verse of chapter xvi. ; and that there is good reason to believe that Mark's Gospel was, if not the original one, at least the earliest.

2. It is clear that to prove such a miracle as the reappearance in life of a man who had been publicly slain, the direct and concurrent testimony of eye-witnesses would be necessary ;—that two or more should state that they saw him at such a time and place, and *knew* him ;—and that this clear testimony should be recorded and handed down to us in an authentic document. This degree of evidence we *might* have had :—this we have not. We have epistles from Peter, James, John, and Jude—all of whom are said by the Evangelists to have seen Jesus after he rose from the dead, in none of which epistles is the fact of the resurrection even stated, much less that Jesus was seen by the writer after his resurrection. This point deserves weighty consideration. We have ample evidence that the belief in Christ's resurrection¹ was very early and very general among the disciples, but we have not the direct testimony of any one of the twelve, nor any eye-witness at all, that they saw him on earth after his death. Many writers say, "*he was seen*" ;—no one says, "*I saw him alive in the flesh.*"

There are three apparent exceptions to this, which, however, when examined, will prove rather confirmatory of our statement than otherwise. If the last chapter of the fourth Gospel were written by the Apostle John, it would contain the direct testimony of an eye-witness to the appearance of Jesus upon earth after his crucifixion. But its genuineness has long been a matter of question among learned men,² and few can read it critically and retain the belief that it is a real relic of the beloved Apostle, or even that it originally formed part of the Gospel to which it is appended. In

¹ The belief in a general resurrection was, we know, prevalent among the Jews in general, and the disciples of Christ especially ; and it appears from several passages that the opinion was that the resurrection would be immediate upon death (Luke xx. 38 ; xxiii. 43). In this case the belief that Christ was risen would follow immediately on the knowledge of his death.

² See Hug, 484.

the first place, the closing verse of the preceding chapter unmistakably indicates the termination of a history. Then, the general tone of the twenty-first chapter—its particularity as to the distance of the bark from shore, and the exact number of fishes taken—the fire ready made when the disciples came to land—the contradiction between the fourth verse and the seventh and twelfth, as to the recognition of Jesus—all partake strongly of the legendary character, as does likewise the conversation between Jesus and Peter. Again, the miraculous draught of fishes which is here placed after the resurrection of Christ, is by Luke related as happening at the very commencement of his ministry. And finally, the last two verses, it is clear, cannot be from the pen of John, and we have no grounds for supposing them to be less genuine than the rest of the chapter. On a review of the whole question we entertain no doubt that the whole chapter was an addition of later date, perhaps by some elder of the Ephesian Church.

In the first Epistle of Peter (iii. 21, 22), the resurrection and existence in heaven of Jesus are distinctly affirmed; but when we remember that the Jews at that time believed in a future life, and apparently in an immediate transference of the spirit from this world to the next, and that this belief had been especially enforced on the disciples of Jesus (Matt. xvii. 1-4; xxii. 32. Luke xvi. 23-31; xxiii. 43), this will appear very different from an assertion that Jesus had actually risen to an earthly life, and that Peter had seen him. Indeed, the peculiar expression that is made use of at ver. 18, in affirming the doctrine ("being slain in flesh, but made alive again in spirit") indicates, in the true meaning of the original, not a fleshly, but a spiritual revivification.

There remains the statement of Paul (1 Cor. xv. 8), "And last of all, he was seen of me also." This assertion, taken with the context, negatives rather than affirms the reappearance of Christ upon

the earth to the bodily eye of his disciples. The whole statement is a somewhat rambling one, and not altogether consistent with the Gospel narratives; but the chief point to be attended to here is that Paul places the appearance of Jesus to the other disciples on the same footing as his appearance to himself. Now, we know that his appearance to Paul was *in a vision*—a vision visible to Paul alone of all the bystanders, and, therefore, *subjective* or mental merely. Moreover, strictly speaking, there was no *vision* at all;—no one was *seen*; there was a bright light, and a voice was heard. In this all the accounts agree. In a subsequent verse, indeed (xxii. 18) Paul says that, when "in a trance in the Temple at Jerusalem," he "*saw*, him (the Lord) saying to him," &c. But this expression, again, seems to imply hearing, not sight. The conclusion to be drawn from the language of Paul would, therefore, be that the appearance of Jesus to the other disciples was visionary likewise. Our original statement, therefore, remains unqualified:—We might have had, and should have expected to have, the direct assertion of *four* Apostles, that they had seen Jesus on earth and in the flesh after his death:—we have not this assertion from any one of them.

3. The statements which have come down to us as to when, where, by whom, and how often Jesus was seen after his death, present such serious and irreconcilable variations as to prove beyond question that they are not the original statements of eye-witnesses, but merely the form which the original statements had assumed, after much transmission, thirty or forty years after the event to which they relate. Let us examine them more particularly. *It will be seen that they agree in everything that is natural and probable, and disagree in everything that is supernatural and difficult of credence.* All the accounts agree that the women, on their matutinal visit to the sepulchre, found the body gone, and saw some one in white raiment who

spoke to them. *They agree in nothing else.*

(1.) They differ as to the number of the women. John mentions only *one*, Mary Magdalene; Matthew *two*, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary;—Mark *three*, the two Marys and Salome;—Luke *several*, the two Marys, Joanna, and "certain others with them."

(2.) They differ as to the number of persons in white raiment who appeared to the women. Mark speaks of one "young man;"—Matthew of one "angel;"—Luke of two "men;"—John of two "angels."—According to John, also, the appearance of the two angels was not till Mary's second visit to the tomb, after Peter and John had been there.

(3.) They differ as to the words spoken by the apparitions. According to Matthew and Mark they asserted the resurrection of Jesus, and his departure into Galilee, and sent a message to his disciples enjoining them to follow him thither. According to Luke they simply stated that he was risen, and referred to a former prediction of his to this effect. According to John they only asked Mary, "Woman! why weepest thou?"

(4.) They differ in another point. According to Matthew, Luke, and John, the women carried the information as to what they had seen at once to the disciples. According to Mark "they said nothing to any man."

(5.) They differ as to the parties to whom Jesus appeared.—According to Mark it was to no one. According to Matthew it was first to the two women, then to the eleven. According to John it was first to one woman then twice to the assembled Apostles. According to Luke it was first to no woman, but to Cleopas and his companion, then to Peter,¹ and then to the assembled eleven.

(6.) They differ as to the locality.

¹ This appearance to Peter is also mentioned by Paul (1 Cor. xv. 7), from whom probably Luke received it. We have nowhere else any trace of it.

According to Mark it was nowhere. According to Matthew it was first at Jerusalem and then at Galilee, whither the disciples went in obedience to the angelic command. According to Luke it was in Jerusalem and its vicinity, and *there alone*, where the disciples remained in obedience to the reiterated command of Jesus himself.¹ According to the genuine part of John, also, the appearances were confined to Jerusalem.

The account of Paul differs slightly from all the others; it must have been second-hand; and is valuable only as showing the accounts which were current in the Christian Church at the time at which he wrote, and how much these varied from the evangelic documents, which were, in fact, a selection out of these current accounts. The epistle of Paul was written, probably, about the year A.D. 57; the first three Gospels between the years A.D. 60 and 70. The appearance to James, which Paul mentions, was taken from the Gospel to the Hebrews, now lost.²

Now, we put it to any candid man whether the discrepancies in these accounts are not of a nature, and to an extent, entirely to disqualify them from being received as evidence of anything, except the currency and credit of such stories among Christians *thirty years after* the death of Christ?

4. A marked and most significant peculiarity in these accounts, which has not received the attention it deserves, is,

¹ Luke xxiv. 49, 53; Acts i. 4. Luke and Matthew thus contradict each other past all possibility of reconciliation. Matthew tells us that Jesus commanded them to go into Galilee, and that they went thither:—Luke tells us that he positively commanded them "not to depart from Jerusalem," and that they remained there (xxiv. 53). But Luke contradicts himself quite as flatly on another point. In the Gospel he represents the ascension as taking place on the evening of the third day after the crucifixion; such is the clear meaning of the text (as may be seen from verses 21, 33, 36, 50):—in the Acts he places the ascension forty days after the resurrection, and says that Jesus was seen by his disciples during the whole interval.

² The passage, however, is preserved by Jerome (See Hennell, p. 227).

that scarcely any of those who are said to have seen Jesus after his resurrection *recognised* him, though long and intimately acquainted with his person. According to Matthew (xxviii. 17), when Jesus appeared to the eleven in Galilee by his own appointment, some, even of them, "doubted"; which could not have been the case had his identity been clearly recognisable. According to Luke, the two disciples, with whom he held a long conversation, and who passed many hours in his company, did not recognise him. "Their eyes were holden, that they should not know him"¹ And even after the disciples had been informed, both of this reappearance and of that to Peter (xxiv. 34-37), yet when Jesus appeared to them, they were affrighted, and supposed that they saw a spirit. According to John, even Mary Magdalene, after Jesus had spoken to her, and she had turned to look at him, still did not recognise him, but supposed him to be the gardener. In the spurious part of John (xxi. 4-6) the same want of recognition is observable. In the spurious part of Mark we see traces of a belief that Jesus assumed various forms after his resurrection, to account, doubtless, for the non-recognition of some and the disbelief of others (xvi. 11, 12, 13): "After that he appeared in *another form* unto two of them." Now, if it really were Jesus who appeared to these various parties, would this want of recognition have been possible? If it were Jesus, he was so changed that his most intimate friends

¹ Here another interesting point comes in for consideration. The conversation between Jesus and his two companions turned upon the Messianic prophecies, which the disciples held to have been disappointed by the death of Jesus, but which Jesus assured them related to and were fulfilled in him. Now, if the conclusion at which we arrived in a previous chapter (iii.) be correct, viz., that the Old Testament prophecies contain no real reference to a suffering Messiah, or to Jesus at all, it follows that at least half the story of Cleopas must be fabulous, unless, indeed, we adopt the supposition that Jesus held the same erroneous views respecting these prophecies as his disciples.

did not know him. How then can *we* know that it was himself?

We will not attempt to construct, as several have endeavoured to do, out of these conflicting traditions, a narrative of the real original occurrence which gave rise to them, and of the process by which they attained the form and consistency at which they have arrived in the evangelical documents. Three different suppositions may be adopted, each of which has found favour in the eyes of some writers. We may either imagine that Jesus was not really and entirely dead when taken down from the cross, a supposition which Paulus and others show to be far from destitute of probability:¹ or we may imagine that the apparition of Jesus to his disciples belongs to that class of appearances of departed spirits for which so much staggering and bewildering evidence is on record;² or, lastly, we may believe that the minds of the disciples, excited by the disappearance of the body, and the announcement by the women of his resurrection, mistook some passing individual for their crucified Lord, and that from such an origin multiplied rumours of his reappearance arose and spread. We do not, ourselves, definitively adopt any of these hypotheses: we wish simply to call attention to the circumstance that we have no clear, consistent, credible account of the resurrection; that the only elements of the narrative which are retained and remain uniform in all its forms--viz., the disappearance of the body, and the appearance of someone in white at the tomb, are simple and probable, and in no way necessitate, or clearly point to, the surmise of a bodily resurrection at all. Christ *may* have risen from the dead and appeared to his disciples; *but it is certain that if he did, the Gospels do not contain a correct account of such resurrection and reappearance.*

II. The conduct of the Apostles subsequent to the death of Jesus—the

¹ Strauss, iii. 288. ² See Bush's *Anastasis*, 156.

marked change in their character from timidity to boldness, and in their feelings from deep depression and dismay to satisfaction and triumph—as depicted in the Acts, affords far stronger evidence in favour of the *bodily* resurrection of their Lord, than any of the narratives which have recorded the event. It seems to us certain that the Apostles *believed* in the resurrection of Jesus with absolute conviction. Nothing short of such a belief could have sustained them through what they had to endure, or given them enthusiasm for what they had to do; the question, therefore, which remains for our decision is, whether the Apostles could have believed it, had it not been fact; whether their reception of the doctrine of a general resurrection, or rather of a future life,¹ coupled with the disappearance of the body of Jesus from the sepulchre in which he had been laid, and the report of the women regarding the statement of the angelic vision, be sufficient to account for so vivid and actuating a faith, without the supposition of his actual appearance to themselves; whether, in fact, the Apostles, excited by the report that he was risen, could have believed that they had seen him if they had not really done so. This question will be differently answered by different minds; nor do we know that any argument will weigh more on either side than the simple statement of the problem to be resolved.²

¹ The current belief in those days appears to have been not in an immediate liberation of the soul to a spiritual existence but in an ultimate resurrection of all at the great day of account. John xi. 24; Luke xx. 33; Mark xii. 23.

² It is certain that we, in these days, could not believe in the resurrection of an individual to an earthly life unless we had ascertained his death, and ourselves seen him afterwards alive. But we cannot justly apply this reasoning to the early followers of Christ; they were not men of critical, inquiring, or doubting minds, nor accustomed to sift or scrutinise testimony, but, on the contrary, inured to marvels, and trained to regard the supernatural as almost an ordinary part of the natural, given moreover to see visions, and unhesitatingly to accept them as divine communications.

Certainly, the bold faith of the Apostles, if sufficient, is the *only* sufficient evidence for the occurrence; the narrative testimony would be inadequate to prove a far more credible event. All we can say is this, that a belief in the resurrection and bodily reappearance of Jesus early prevailed and rapidly obtained currency in the Christian community; that the Apostles shared the belief in the resurrection, and did not discourage that in the bodily reappearance; that, however, none of them (the fourth Gospel not having been written by John) has left us his own testimony to having himself seen Jesus alive after his death; and that some of the disciples doubted, and others long after disbelieved the fact.¹

In order to mitigate our pain at finding that the fact of Christ's resurrection has been handed down to us on such inadequate testimony as to render it at best a doubtful inference, it is desirable to inquire whether, in reality, it has the doctrinal value which it has been the habit of theologians to attribute to it. We have been taught to regard it not only as the chief and crowning proof of the divinity of our Saviour's mission, but as the type, earnest, and assurance of our own translation to a life beyond the grave. It is very questionable, however, whether either of these views of it is fully justified by reason.

There can be no doubt that the fact of an individual having been miraculously restored to life is a signal proof of divine interposition in his behalf. Such restoration may be viewed in three lights—either as a reward for a life of extraordinary virtue, or as an intimation that his mission upon earth had been prematurely cut short, and that his re-

¹ See I Cor. xv. 12. The whole argument of Paul respecting the resurrection is remarkable—it is simply this, there must be a resurrection from the dead because Christ "*is preached*" to have risen; and that if there were no resurrection, then Christ could not be risen. It would seem as if he considered the truth of the resurrection of Christ to depend upon the correctness of the doctrine of the general resurrection (verse 13).

animation was necessary for its fulfilment, or as an announcement to the world that he was in a peculiar manner the object of divine regard and the subject of divine influence. The first point of view is evidently irrational, and the offspring of unregenerate and uncultivated thought. It is prompted either by the inconsiderate instincts of the natural man, or by disbelief in a future life. It implies either that there is no future world, or that this world is preferable to it, since no man, believing in another and a better state of existence, would regard it as an appropriate reward for distinguished excellence to be *reduced to this*. The second point of view is, if possible, still more unreasonable, since it assumes that God had permitted such an interference with and defeat of his plans, that he was obliged to interpose for their renewal. The third aspect in which such a fact is to be regarded alone remains, and is in effect the one in which it is commonly viewed throughout Christendom, viz., as a public announcement from the Most High, "This is my beloved Son, hear ye him." But this point of view is attended with many difficulties.

In the first place, if the Gospel narratives are to be taken as our standing-ground (and they are as valid for the one case as for the other), the restoration of the dead to life did not necessarily imply any such peculiar favour, or contain any such high announcement. The evangelists record *three* instances of such miraculous resuscitation, in none of which have we any reason for believing the subject of the miracle to be peculiarly an object of divine love or approbation, in all of which the miracle was simply one of mercy to mourning friends. The resuscitated parties were all obscure individuals, and only one of them appears to have been a follower of Christ. *Secondly*, this point of view was not the one taken by the Apostles. To them the value of Christ's resurrection consisted in its enabling them still to retain, or rather to resume, that belief

in the Messiahship of Jesus which his death had shaken. If restored to life, he might yet be, and probably was, that Great Deliverer whom, as Jews, they watched and waited and prayed for; if he were dead, then that cherished notion was struck dead with him. Now, if we are right in the conclusion at which we arrived in an earlier chapter, viz., that Jesus had nothing in common with that liberating and triumphant conqueror predicted by the Jewish prophets and expected by the Jewish nation: it follows that the especial effect which the resurrection of Christ produced upon the minds of his disciples was *to confirm them in an error*. This, to them, was its dogmatic value, the ground on which they hailed the announcement and cherished the belief. *Thirdly*, it will admit of question whether, in the eye of pure reason, the resurrection of Christ, considered as an attestation to the celestial origin of his religion, be not superfluous—whether it be not human weakness, rather than human reason, which needs external miracle as sanction and buttress of a system which may well rely upon its own innate strength, whether the internal does not surpass and supersede the external testimony to its character, whether the divine truths which Christ taught should not be to us the all-sufficient attestation of his divine mission. We have seen in the preceding chapter that miraculous power in any individual is no guarantee for the correctness of his teaching. We have seen that if the doctrines which Jesus taught approve themselves to the enlightened understanding and the uncorrupted heart, they are equally binding on our allegiance whether he wrought miracles in the course of his career or not. And if the truth that God is a loving father, and the precept, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," derive no corroboration from the resurrection of Lazarus or the Youth of Nain, neither can they from that of Christ himself. Doubtless we should sit with more prostrate submission and a deeper

reverence at the feet of a teacher who came to us from the grave, but it is probably only the infirmity of our faith and reason which would cause us to do so.¹ Rationally considered, Christ's resurrection cannot prove doctrines true that would else be false, nor certain that would else be doubtful. Therefore, considered as a reward, it is contradictory and absurd; considered as the renewal of an interrupted mission, it involves an unworthy and monstrous conception of God's providence; considered as an attestation to the Messiahship of Jesus, it is an attestation to an error; considered as a sanction and corroboration of his doctrines, it is, or ought to be, superfluous.

Is the other view which we have been accustomed to take of Christ's resurrection—viz., as the type, pledge, and foretelling of our own,—more consonant to sound reason? We believe the reverse will prove nearer to the truth. That it was regarded in this view by the Apostles is here no argument for us. For they looked for the coming of their Lord and the end of the world, if not in their own lifetime, at least in that of the existing generation,—when they who were alive would be caught up into the clouds, and those who were dead would *come forth out of their graves*, and join together the glorious company of the redeemed. They looked for a *bodily* resurrection for themselves—which on their supposition of the date might appear possible—a resurrection, therefore, of which that of Jesus was a prototype—a pattern—a cognate occurrence. But in *our* position the case is not only altered, but reversed. Christ's resurrection was believed, and is affirmed to have been, a reanimation of the body which he wore in life; it could, therefore, be an earnest of the resurrection of those only whose bodies still remained to be reanimated; it was an exceptional case; it refers not to us; it conveys no

hope to us;—*we are not of those whose resurrection it could typify or assure*; for our bodies, like those of the countless generations who have lived and passed away since Christ trod our earth, will have crumbled into dust, and passed into other combinations, and become in turn the bodies of myriads of other animated beings before the great expected day of the resurrection of the just. To us a bodily resurrection is impossible. If, therefore, Christ's resurrection were *spiritual*—independent of his buried body—it might be a type and foreshadowing of our own;—if, on the other hand, as the evangelists relate, it was corporeal—if his body left the grave undecayed, and appeared on earth, and ascended into glory,—then its value as a pledge belonged to the men of that time alone,—we have neither part nor lot in its signification;—it is rather an extinguisher than a confirmation of our hopes.

It will be seen that we make no scruple in negating a doctrine held *verbally* by the Church, viz., "the resurrection of the body"; since, whatever was intended by the authors of this phrase¹—the meaning of which is by no means clear to us, and was probably no clearer to themselves,—thus much is certain, that *our* "resurrection of the body" can bear no similarity to Christ's resurrection of the body;—for his body remained only a few hours in the grave, and, we are expressly told, "did not see corruption," and ours, we know, remains there for untold years, and moulders away into the original elements of its marvellous chemistry.

We conclude, then, as before:—that as we cannot hope to rise, as Christ is said to have done, with our own present uncorrupted body, his resurrection, if it were a reanimation of his earthly frame, can be no argument, proof, pledge,

¹ Jesus seems to intimate as much when he says, "If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

¹ "We can," says Pearson, "no otherwise expound this article teaching the resurrection of the body, than by asserting that the same bodies which have lived and died shall live again: that the same flesh which is corrupted shall be restored."—*Pearson on the Creed*, art. xii.

pattern, or foreshadowing of our own. If, on the contrary, his resurrection were spiritual, and his appearances to his disciples mental and apparitionary only, they would, *pro tanto*, countenance the

idea of a future state. Our *interest*, therefore, as waiters and hoppers for an immortality, would appear to lie in *disbelieving* the letter of the Scripture narratives.

CHAPTER XII

IS CHRISTIANITY A REVEALED RELIGION?

HAVING now arrived at this point of our inquiry, let us pause and cast a summary glance on the ground over which we have travelled, and the conclusions at which we have arrived. We have found that the popular doctrine of Scriptural Inspiration rests on no foundation whatever, but is a gratuitous as well as an untenable assumption. We have seen that neither the books of Moses nor the laws of Moses, as we have them, were (at least as a whole) the production of the great Leader and Lawgiver whose name they bear. We have seen ample reason for concluding that a belief in One only supreme God was not the primary religion either of the Hebrew nation or the Hebrew priests; but that their Theism—originally limited and impure—was gradually elevated and purified into perfect and exclusive monotheism by the influence of their Poets and Sages and the progressive advance of the people in intelligence and civilisation. We have discovered that their Prophets were Poets and Statesmen, not Predictors—and that none of their writings contain a single prediction which was originally designed by them, or can be honestly interpreted by us, to foretell the appearance and career of Jesus of Nazareth. What have been commonly regarded as such are happy and *applicable quotations*: but no more. We have seen further that none of the four histories of Christ which have come down to us are completely genuine and faithful;—that while they are ample and adequate for showing us what

Christ was, and what was the essence and spirit of his teaching, we yet do not possess sufficient certainty that they record, in any special instance, the precise words or actions of Christ, to warrant us in building upon those words or actions doctrines revolting to our uncorrupted instincts and our cultivated sense. We have found, moreover, that the Apostles—zealous and devout men as they were—were yet most imperfect and fallible expounders of the mind of their departed Lord. We have seen that miracles—even where the record of them is adequate and above suspicion, if any such case there be—are no sufficient guarantee of the truth of the doctrines preached by the worker of those wonders. And finally we have been compelled to conclude that not only is the resurrection of our Lord, as narrated in the Gospels, encumbered with too many difficulties and contradictions to be received as unquestionable, but that it is far from having the dogmatic value usually attached to it, as a pledge and foreshowing of our own.

But however imperfect may be the records we possess of Christ's ministry, this imperfection does not affect the nature or authority of his mission. Another great question, therefore, here opens before us:—"Was Christ a divinely-commissioned Teacher of Truth?" In other words, "Is Christianity to be regarded as a Religion revealed by God to man through Christ?"

What is the meaning which, in ordinary theological parlance, we attach to

the words, "Divine Revelation?" What do we intend to signify when we say that "God spoke" to this Prophet or to that saint?

We are all of us conscious of thoughts which *come to us*—which are not, properly speaking, *our own*—which we do not create, do not elaborate;—flashes of light, glimpses of truth, or of what seems to us such, brighter and sublimer than commonly dwell in our minds, which we are not conscious of having *wrought out* by any process of inquiry or meditation. These are frequent and brilliant in proportion to the intellectual gifts and spiritual elevation of the individual: they may well be termed inspirations—revelations; but it is not such as these that we mean when we speak of the Revelation by Christ.

Those who look upon God as a Moral Governor, as well as an original Creator,—a God at hand, not a God afar off in the distance of infinite space, and in the remoteness of past or future eternity,—who conceive of him as taking a watchful and presiding interest in the affairs of the world, and as influencing the hearts and actions of men,—believe that through the workings of the Spirit He has spoken to many, has whispered His will to them, has breathed great and true thoughts into their minds, has "wrought mightily" within them, has in their secret communings and the deep visions of the night caused His Spirit to move over the troubled waters of their souls, and educated light and order from the mental chaos. These are the views of many religious minds; but these are not what we mean when we speak of the Revelation made by God to Christ.

Those, again, who look upon God as the great artificer of the world of life and matter, and upon man, with his wonderful corporeal and mental frame, as His direct work, conceive the same idea in a somewhat modified and more material form. They believe that He has made men with different intellectual capacities; and has endowed some with brains so much larger and finer

than those of ordinary men as to enable them to see and originate truths which are hidden from the mass; and that when it is His will that Mankind should make some great step forward, should achieve some pregnant discovery, He calls into being some cerebral organisation of more than ordinary magnitude and power, as that of David, Isaiah, Plato, Shakespeare, Bacon, Newton, Luther, Pascal, which gives birth to new ideas and grander conceptions of the truths vital to humanity. But we mean something essentially distinct from this when we speak of Christ as the Teacher of a Religion revealed to him by his Father.

When a Christian affirms Christianity to be a "revealed religion," he intends simply and without artifice to declare his belief that the doctrines and precepts which Christ taught were not the production of his own (human) mind, either in its ordinary operations or in its flights of sublimest contemplation; but were directly and supernaturally communicated to him from on high.¹ He means this, or he means nothing that is definable and distinctive. What grounds have we, then, for adopting such an opinion?

It is evident that, if the conclusions to which our previous investigations have led us be correct, our only arguments for believing Christianity to be a divine revelation in contradistinction to a human conception must be drawn from the *superhumanity* of its nature and contents. What human intellect could ascertain it would be superfluous for God to reveal. The belief of Christ himself, that his teaching "was not his, but his Father's,"—even if we were certain that he used these precise words, and intended them to convey precisely the meaning we attach to them,—could not suffice us, for the reasons assigned in the first chapter of this work. The belief in communications with the Deity has in all ages

¹ Those who believe that Christ was God—if any such really exist—must, of course, hold everything he taught was, *ipso facto*, a divine revelation. With such all argument and inquiry is necessarily superseded.

been common to the most exalted and poetical order of religious minds. The fact that Christ held a conviction which he shared with the great and good of other times can be no argument for ascribing to him divine communications distinct from those granted to the great and good of other times. It remains, therefore, a simple question for our consideration, whether the doctrines and precepts taught by Jesus are so new, so profound, so perfect, so distinctive, so above and beyond parallel, that they could not have emanated naturally from a clear, simple, unsoiled, unwarped, powerful, meditative mind,—living four hundred years after Socrates and Plato—brought up among the pure Essenes, nourished on the wisdom of Solomon, the piety of David, the poetry of Isaiah—elevated by the knowledge and illuminated by the love of the one true God.

Now on this subject we hope our confession of faith will be acceptable to all save the narrowly orthodox. It is difficult, without exhausting superlatives, even to unexpressive and wearisome satiety, to do justice to our intense love, reverence, and admiration for the character and teaching of Jesus. We regard him not as the perfection of the intellectual or philosophic mind, but as the perfection of the spiritual character,—as surpassing all men of all times in the closeness and depth of his communion with the Father. In reading his sayings, we feel that we are holding converse with the wisest, purest, noblest Being that ever clothed thought in the poor language of humanity. In studying his life we feel that we are following the footsteps of the highest ideal yet presented to us upon earth. "Blessed be God that so much manliness has been lived out, and stands there yet, a lasting monument to mark how high the tides of divine life have risen in the world of man!"

But these convictions—strong, deep-seated, and well-grounded as they are—do not bring us to the conclusion that either the rare moral or mental superiorities of Jesus were supernatural en-

dowments, in the common acceptance of the word. The Old Testament *contained* his teaching; it was reserved for him to elicit, publish, and enforce it. A thoughtful perusal of Job, the Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Isaiah will show beyond question the germs of those views which in the purer and sublimer genius of Christ rose to so high an elevation.¹ The doctrine of a future world, though not enforced, perhaps probably not found, in the Old Testament, was, we know, currently believed among the Jews before the time of Jesus, and must have been familiar to him from his infancy. We have no hesitation in concluding that a pure and powerful mind, filled with warm affections and devotional feelings, and studying the Hebrew Scriptures *discriminatively*, appropriating and assimilating what was good and noble, and rejecting what was mean and low, could and might naturally arrive at the conclusion which Jesus reached, as to the duties of men, the attributes of God, and the relation of man to God. Christianity is distinguished from Judaism rather by what it excluded than by what it added. It is an eclecticism and an expansion of the best elements of its predecessor. It selects the grand and beautiful, the tender, the true, and ignores or suppresses the exclusive, the narrow, the corrupt, the coarse, and the vindictive. It is Moses, David, Solomon, Isaiah purified, sublimated and developed. If this be so, then the supposition that Christianity was supernaturally communicated falls to the ground as needless and therefore inadmissible. What man could discover naturally God would not communicate supernaturally.

But we may go further. Not only is there no necessity for supposing that Christ's views as to God and duty were

¹ A quotation of texts is scarcely the right mode of proving this. See Hennell for an exposition of how much of Christianity was already extant in Jewish teaching; also Mackay's "Progress of the Intellect," ii. 376. [Em. Deutch's paper on the Talmud, *Quart. Review*, No. 246, and Renan, "Vie de Jesus," ch. v.]

supernaturally revealed to him, but there is almost a necessity for adopting an opposite conclusion. If they were the elaboration of his own mind we may well imagine that they may contain some admixture of error and imperfection. If they were revealed to him by God this could not be the case. If, therefore, we find that Jesus was in error in any point either of his practical or his speculative teaching, our conclusion, hitherto a probability, becomes a certainty. It is evident that we could treat of this point with far more satisfaction if we were in a position to pronounce with perfect precision what Christ did, and what he did not, teach. But as we have seen that many words are put into his mouth which he never uttered, we cannot ascertain this as undoubtedly as is desirable. There must still remain some degree of doubt as to whether the errors and imperfections which we detect originated with or were shared by Christ, or whether they were wholly attributable to his followers and historians.

There are, however, some matters on which the general concurrence of the evangelical histories and their undesigned and incidental intimations lead us to conclude that Jesus did share the mistakes which prevailed among his disciples, though, in going even so far as this, we speak with great diffidence. He appears to have held erroneous views respecting demoniacal possession, the interpretation of Scripture,¹ his own Messiahship, his second coming, and the approaching end of the world. At least, if he held the views ascribed to him (and the preponderance of evidence is in favour of the assumption that he

¹ Perhaps the most singular instance of this misinterpretation of Scripture is in the sophistical argument ascribed to Christ, concerning the supposed address of David to the Messiah. "The Lord said unto my Lord," &c. (Matth. xxii. 41, and parallel passage). It appears clear that this Psalm was not composed by David, but was addressed to David by Nathan, or some Court Prophet, on the occasion of some of his signal victories.—See "Hebrew Monarchy," p. 92. David did not call the Messiah "Lord"; it was the Poet that called David "Lord."

did), we know that on these topics he was mistaken. Now if he was so in error his teaching could not have been an infallible revelation from the God of truth, in the sense in which Christendom employs that phrase.

But we now come upon another question, which, if answered in the negative, at once closes the inquiry to which this chapter is devoted. "Is the revelation of an undiscoverable truth possible?" That is, "Can any doctrine be taught by God to man—be supernaturally infused, that is, into his mind, which he might not by the employment of his own faculties have discerned or elicited?" In other words, "Can the human mind receive an idea which it could not originate?" We think it plain that it cannot; though the subject is one which may be better illuminated by reflection than by discussion. At least it is difficult to conceive the nature and formation of that intellect which can comprehend and grasp a truth when presented to it, and perceive that it is a truth, and which yet could not, in the course of time and under favourable conditions, work out that truth by the ordinary operation of its own powers. It appears to us that, by the very nature of the statement, the faculties necessary for the one mental process must be competent to the other.¹ If an idea (and a truth is only an idea, or a combination of ideas, which approves itself to us) can find entrance into the mind and take up its abode there, does not this very fact show a fitness for the residence of that idea?—a fitness, therefore, which would have ensured admittance to the idea if suggested in any of those mental processes which we call thought, or by any of those

¹ It may be objected that external facts may be revealed which could not be discovered. We may be assured by revelation that the inhabitants of Saturn have wings or have no heads, but then we do not recognise the truth of the assurance. We may be assured by revelation of the existence of a future world; but could we receive the assurance unless our minds were already so prepared for it, or so constituted, that it would naturally have occurred to them?

combinations of occurrences which we call accident—a fitness, therefore, which, as the course of time and the occurrence of a thousand such possible suggesting accidents must almost necessarily have ensured the *presentation* of the idea, would also have ensured its *reception*? If, on the other hand, the idea, from its strangeness, its immensity, its want of harmony with the nature and existing furniture of the mind, could never have presented itself naturally, would not the same strangeness, the same vastness, the same incompatibility of essence incapacitate the mind from receiving it if presented supernaturally?

Further, we are at a loss to imagine how a man can *distinguish* between an idea revealed to him and an idea conceived by him. In what manner and by what sure token can it be made clear to him that a thought came to him from without, not arose within; he may perceive that it is resplendently bright, unquestionably new; he may be quite unconscious of any process of ratiocination or meditation by which it can have been originated; but this is no more than may be said of half the ideas of profound and contemplative genius. Shall we say that it was breathed into him “in a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon man”; and that, therefore, he assumes that it is not his, but God’s? Yet what is this but to declare that God chooses for his communications with the mind of man the period of its most unquestionable imperfection, when the phantasy is ascendant and the judgment is torpid and in abeyance? Shall we say that the thought was spoken to him aloud, in the ordinary language of humanity, and that, therefore, he knows it to have been a divine communication, not a human conception! But what singular logic is this! Is the voice of God, then, only, or then most, recognisable when it borrows the language of man? Is that unprecise and feeble instrument of thought and utterance, invented by man’s faulty faculties, God’s best and surest

mode of communication with the spirit he has created? Nay, is not imperfect language an *impossible* medium for the conveyance of absolute and infinite truth? And do we really mean that we feel *certain* it is God’s voice which we hear from the clouds, and *doubtful* that it is his which speaks to us silently, and in the deep and sacred musings of the Soul? We cannot intend to maintain this monstrous thesis.

Our reflections, then, bring us to this conclusion:—that the only certain proof we can have of a revelation must lie in the truths it teaches being such as are inaccessible to, and therefore incomprehensible by, the mind of man; that if they are such as he can conceive and grasp and accept, they are such as he might have discovered, and he has no means of knowing that he has not discovered them; if they are such as he could not have discovered, they are such as he cannot receive, such as he could not recognise or ascertain to be truth.

Since, then, we can find no adequate reason for believing Jesus to be the Son of God, nor his doctrines to be a direct and special revelation to him from the Most High—using these phrases in their ordinary signification—in what light *do* we regard Christ and Christianity?

We do not believe that Christianity contains anything which a genius like Christ’s, brought up and nourished as his had been, might not have disentangled for itself. We hold that God has so arranged matters in this beautiful and well-ordered, but mysteriously-governed universe, that one great mind after another will arise from time to time, as such are needed, to discover and flash forth before the eyes of men the truths that are wanted, and the amount of truth that can be borne. We conceive that this is effected by endowing them, or (for we pretend to no scholastic nicety of expression) by having arranged that Nature and the course of events shall send them into the world endowed with that superior mental and moral organisation, in which grand truths, sub-

lime gleams of spiritual light, will spontaneously and inevitably arise. Such a one we believe was Jesus of Nazareth, the most exalted religious genius whom God ever sent upon the earth; in himself an embodied revelation; humanity in its divinest phase, "God manifest in the flesh," according to Eastern hyperbole; an exemplar vouchsafed, in an early age of the World, of what man may and should become, in the course of ages, in his progress towards the realisation of his destiny; an individual gifted with a grand clear intellect, a noble soul, a fine organisation, marvellous moral intuitions, and a perfectly balanced moral being; and who, by virtue of these endowments, saw further than all other men—

"Beyond the verge of that blue sky
Where God's sublimest secrets lie";

an earnest, not only of what humanity may be, but of what it will be, when the most perfected races shall bear the same relation to the finest minds of existing times, as these now bear to the Bushmen or the Esquimaux. He was, as Parker beautifully expresses it, "the possibility of the race made real." He was a sublime poet, prophet, moralist, and hero; and had the usual fate of such—misrepresented by his enemies,—misconstrued by his friends; unhappy in this, that his nearest intimates and followers were not of a calibre to understand him; happy in this, that his words contained such undying seeds of truth as could survive even the media through which they passed. Like the wheat found in the Egyptian Catacombs, they retain the power of germinating undiminished, whenever their appropriate soil is found. They have been preserved essentially almost pure, notwithstanding the Judaic narrowness of Peter, the orthodox passions of John, the metaphysical subtleties of Paul. Everything seems to us to confirm the conclusion that we have in the Christianity of Scripture, not a code of law, still less a system of dogma, but a mass of beautiful, simple, sublime, profound, *not perfect* truths, obscured by

having come down to us through the intervention of minds far inferior to that of its Author—narrowed by their uncultivation—marred by their misapprehensions—and tarnished by their foreign admixtures. It is a collection of grand truths, transmitted to us by men who only half comprehended their grandeur, and imperfectly grasped their truth.

In grasping after a certainty, which can be but a shadow, ordinary Christianity has lost the substance—it has sacrificed in practical more than it has gained in dogmatic value. In making Christ the miraculous Son of God, it has destroyed Jesus as a human exemplar. If he were in a peculiar manner "the only begotten of the Father," a partaker in his essential nature, then he is immeasurably removed from us; we may revere, we cannot imitate him. We listen to his precepts with submission, perhaps even greater than before. We dwell upon the excellence of his character, no longer for imitation, but for worship. We read with the deepest love and admiration of his genius, his gentleness, his mercy, his unwearying activity in doing good, his patience with the stupid, his compassion for the afflicted, his courage in facing torture, his meekness in enduring wrong; and then we turn away and say, "Ah! he was a God; such virtue was not for humanity, nor for us." It is useless by honeyed words to disguise the truth. If Christ were a man, he is our *pattern*; "the possibility of our race made real." If he were God—a partaker of God's nature, as the orthodox maintain—then they are guilty of a cruel mockery in speaking of him as a type and model of human excellence. How can one endowed with the perfections of a God be an example to beings encumbered with the weaknesses of humanity? Adieu, then, to Jesus as anything but a Propounder of doctrines, an Utterer of precepts! The *vital* portion of Christianity is swept away. His *Character*—that from which so many in all ages have drawn their moral life and strength—that which so irresistibly enlists our deepest sympathies,

and rouses our highest aspirations—it becomes an irreverence to speak of. The character, the conduct, the virtues of a God!—these are felt to be indecent expressions. Verily, orthodoxy has slain the life of Christianity. In the presumptuous endeavour to exalt Jesus, it has shut him up in the Holy of Holies, and hid him from the gaze of humanity. It has displaced him from an object of imitation into an object of worship. It has made his life barren, that his essence might be called divine.

“But,” it will be objected, “what, on this system, becomes of the religion of the poor and ignorant, the uneducated and the busy? If Christianity is not a divine revelation, and therefore entirely and infallibly true—if the Gospels are not perfectly faithful and accurate expositors of Christ’s teaching and of God’s will,—what a fearful loss to those who have neither the leisure, the learning, nor the logical habits of thought requisite to construct out of the relics that remain to them and the nature that lies before them a faith for themselves!”

To this objection we reply that the more religion can be shown to consist in the realisation of great moral and spiritual truths, rather than in the reception of distinct dogmas, the more the position of these classes is altered for the better. In no respect is it altered for the worse. Their *creeds*, *i.e.*, their collection of dogmas, those who do not or cannot think for themselves must always take on the authority of others. They do so now: they have always done so. They have hitherto believed certain doctrines because wise and good men assure them that these doctrines were revealed by Christ, and that Christ was a Teacher sent from God. They will in future believe them because wise and good men assure them of their truth, and their own hearts confirm the assurance. The only difference lies in this,—that, in the one case, the authority on which they lean vouches for the truth; in the other, for the Teacher who proclaimed it.

Moreover, the Bible still remains;

though no longer as an inspired and infallible record. Though not the word of God, it contains the words of the wisest, the most excellent, the most devout men, who have ever held communion with him. The poor, the ignorant, the busy, need not, do not, will not, read it critically. To each of them it will still, through all time, present the Gospels and the Psalms,—the glorious purity of Jesus, the sublime piety of David and of Job. Those who read it for its spirit, not for its dogmas—as the poor, the ignorant the busy, *if unperverted*, will do—will still find in it all that is necessary for their guidance in life, their support in death, their consolation in sorrow, their rule of duty, and their trust in God.

A more genuine and important objection to the consequences of our views is felt by indolent minds on their own account. They shrink from the toil of working out truth for themselves, out of the materials which Providence has placed before them. They long for the precious metal, but loathe the rude ore out of which it has to be extricated by the laborious alchemy of thought. A ready-made creed is the Paradise of their lazy dreams. A string of authoritative dogmatic propositions comprises the whole mental wealth which they desire. The volume of nature, the volume of history, the volume of life, appal and terrify them. Such men are the materials out of whom good Catholics—of all sects—are made. They form the uninquiring and submissive flocks which rejoice the hearts of all Priests. Let such cling to the faith of their forefathers—if they can. But men whose minds are cast in a nobler mould and are instinct with a diviner life, who love truth more than rest, and the peace of Heaven rather than the peace of Eden, to whom “a loftier being brings severer cares,”—

“Who know Man does not live by joy alone
But by the presence of the power of God,”—

such must cast behind them the hope of any repose or tranquillity save that which

is the last reward of long agonies of thought; they must relinquish all prospect of any Heaven save that of which tribulation is the avenue and portal; they must gird up their loins and trim their lamp for a work which

cannot be put by, and which must not be negligently done. "He," says Zschokke, "who does not like living in the *furnished lodgings of tradition*, must build his own house, his own system of thought and faith, for himself."¹

CHAPTER XIII

CHRISTIAN ECLECTICISM

CHRISTIANITY, then, not being a revelation, but a conception—the Gospels not being either inspired or accurate, but fallible and imperfect human records—the practical conclusion from such premises must be obvious to all. Every doctrine and every proposition which the Scriptures contain, whether or not we believe it to have come to us un mutilated and unmarred from the mouth of Christ, is open, and must be subjected, to the scrutiny of reason. Some tenets we shall at once accept as the most perfect truth that can be received by the human intellect and heart;—others we shall reject as contradicting our instincts and offending our understandings;—others, again, of a more mixed nature, we must analyse, that so we may extricate the seed of truth from the husk of error, and elicit "the divine idea that lies at the bottom of appearance."¹

I. I value the Religion of Jesus, not as being absolute and perfect truth, but as containing more truth, purer truth, higher truth, stronger truth, than has ever yet been given to man. Much of his teaching I unhesitatingly receive as, to the best of my judgment, unimprovable and unsurpassable—fitted, if obeyed, to make earth all that a finite and material scene can be, and man only a little lower than the angels. *The worthlessness of ceremonial observances, and the necessity of essential righteousness*—"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord! Lord!

but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven;" "By their fruits ye shall know them;" "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice;"—*The enforcement of purity of heart as the security for purity of life, and of the government of the thoughts as the originators and forerunners of action*—"He that looketh on a woman, to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart;" "Out of the heart proceed murders, adulteries, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man;"—*Universal good-will towards men*—"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;" "whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, that do ye also unto them, for this is the Law and the Prophets;"—*Forgiveness of injuries* "Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you; pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you;"—"If ye love them only that love you, what reward have ye? do not even publicans the same?"—*The necessity of self-sacrifice in the cause of duty*—"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake;" "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me;" "If thy right hand offend thee cut it off and cast it from thee;" "No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God;"—*Humility*—"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth;"

¹ Zschokke's "Autobiography," p. 29. The whole section is most deeply interesting;

¹ Fichte.

"He that humbleth himself shall be exalted;" "He that is greatest among you, let him be your servant;"—*Genuine sincerity: being, not seeming*—"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men to be seen of them;" "When thou prayest enter into thy closet and shut thy door;" "When thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast;"—all these sublime precepts need no miracle, no voice from the clouds, to recommend them to our allegiance, or to assure us of their divinity; they command obedience by virtue of their inherent rectitude and beauty, and vindicate their author as himself the one towering perpetual miracle of history.

II. Next in perfection come the views which Christianity unfolds to us of God in his relation to man, which were probably as near the truth as the minds of men could in that age receive. God is represented as Our *Father* in Heaven—to be whose especial children is the best reward of the peace-makers—to see whose face is the highest hope of the pure in heart—who is ever at hand to strengthen his true worshippers—to whom is due our heartiest love, our humblest submission—whose most acceptable worship is righteous conduct and a holy heart—in whose constant presence our life is passed—to whose merciful disposal we are resigned by death. It is remarkable that, throughout the Gospels, with the exception, I believe, of a single passage,¹ nothing is said as to the *nature* of the Deity:—his *relation* to us is alone insisted on:—all that is needed for our consolation, our strength, our guidance, is assured to us:—the purely speculative is passed over and ignored.

Thus, in the two great points essential to our practical life—viz., our feelings towards God and our conduct towards man—the Gospels, relieved of their unauthentic portions, and read in an understanding spirit, not with a slavish and

unintelligent adherence to the naked letter, contain little about which men may differ—little from which they can dissent. He is our Father, we are all brethren. This much lies open to the most ignorant and busy, as fully as to the most leisurely and learned. This needs no Priest to teach it—no authority to endorse it. The rest is Speculation—intensely interesting, indeed, but of no practical necessity.

III. There are, however, other tenets taught in Scripture and professed by Christians, in which reflective minds of all ages have found it difficult to acquiesce. Thus:—however far we may stretch the plea for a liberal interpretation of Oriental speech, it is impossible to disguise from ourselves that the New Testament teaches, in the most unserved manner and in the strongest language, the doctrine of *the efficacy of Prayer* in modifying the divine purposes and in obtaining the boons asked for at the throne of grace. It is true that one passage (John xi. 42) would seem to indicate that prayer was a form which Jesus adopted for the sake of others; it is also remarkable that the model of prayer which he taught to his disciples contains only one simple and modest request for personal and temporal good¹; yet not only are we told that he prayed earnestly and for specific mercies (though with a most submissive will) on occasions of peculiar suffering and trial, but few of his exhortations to his disciples occur more frequently than that to constant prayer, and no promises are more distinct or reiterated than that their prayer shall be heard and answered. "Watch and pray;" "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye shall receive them, and ye shall have them;" "Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he will give it you;" "Ask, and it shall be given you."

¹ "It is a curious fact that the Lord's prayer may be reconstructed," says Wetstein, "almost verbatim out of the Talmud, which also contains a prophetic intimation that all prayer will one day cease, except the prayer of Thanksgiving" (Mackay's "Progress of the Intellect," ii. 374.)

¹ God is a spirit.

No one can read such passages, and the numberless others of a similar character with which both Testaments abound, and doubt that the opinion held both by Christ and his disciples was that "Jehovah is a God that heareth and answereth prayer;"—that favours are to be obtained from Him by earnest and reiterated entreaty; that whatever good thing His sincere worshippers petition for, with *instance* and with faith, shall be granted to them, if consonant to his purposes, and shall be granted in *consequence* of their petition; that, in fact and truth, apart from all metaphysical subtleties and subterfuges the designs of God can be modified and swayed, like those of an earthly father, by the entreaties of His children. This doctrine is set forth throughout the Jewish Scriptures in its coarsest and nakedest form and it reappears in the Christian Scriptures in a form only slightly modified and refined.

Now, this doctrine has in all ages been a stumbling-block to the thoughtful. It is obviously irreconcilable with all that reason and revelation teach us of the divine nature; and the inconsistency has been felt by the ablest of the Scripture writers themselves.¹ Various and desperate have been the expedients and suppositions resorted to, in order to reconcile the conception of an immutable, all-wise, all-foreseeing God, with that of a father who is turned from his course by the prayers of his creatures. But all such efforts are, and are felt to be, hopeless failures. They involve the assertion and negation of the same proposition in one breath. The problem remains still insoluble; and we must either be content to have it so, or we must abandon one or other of the hostile premises.

The religious man, who believes that all events, mental as well as physical, are pre-ordered and arranged according to the decrees of infinite wisdom, and the philosopher, who knows that, by the wise and eternal laws of the universe, cause and effect are indissolubly chained to-

gether, and that one follows the other in inevitable succession,—equally feel that this ordination—this chain—cannot be changeable at the cry of man. To suppose that it can is to place the whole harmonious system of nature at the mercy of the weak reason and the selfish wishes of humanity. If the purpose of God were not wise, they would not be formed:—if wise, they cannot be changed, for then they would become unwise. To suppose that an all-wise Being would alter his designs and modes of proceeding at the entreaty of an unknowing creature, is to believe that compassion would change his wisdom into foolishness. It has been urged that prayer may render a favour wise, which would else be unwise; but this is to imagine that events are not foreseen and pre-ordered, but are arranged and decided *pro re natâ*: it is also to ignore utterly the unquestionable fact, that no event in life or in nature is isolated, and that none can be changed without entailing endless and universal alterations. If the universe is governed by fixed laws, or (which is the same proposition in different language) if all events are pre-ordered by the foreseeing wisdom of an infinite God, then the prayers of thousands of years and generations of martyrs and saints cannot change or modify one iota of our destiny. The proposition is unassailable by the subtlest logic. The weak, fond affections of humanity struggle in vain against the unwelcome conclusion.

It is a conclusion from which the feelings of almost all of us shrink and revolt. The strongest sentiment of our nature, perhaps, is that of our helplessness in the hands of fate, and against this helplessness we seek for a resource in the belief of our dependence on a Higher Power, which can control and will interfere with fate. And though our reason tells us that it is inconceivable that the entreaties of creatures as erring and as blind as we are can influence the all-wise purposes of God, yet we feel an internal voice, more potent and persuasive than reason, which assures us

¹ "God is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man, that he should repent."

that to pray to him in trouble is an irrepressible instinct of our nature—an instinct which precedes teaching—which survives experience—which defies philosophy.

"For sorrow oft the cry of faith
In bitter need will borrow."

It would be an unspeakable consolation to our human infirmity could we, in this case, believe our reason to be erroneous and our instinct true; but we greatly fear that the latter is the result, partly of that anthropomorphism which pervades all our religious conceptions, which our limited faculties suggest, and which education and habit have rooted so fixedly in our mental constitution, and partly of that fond weakness which recoils from the idea of irreversible and inescapable decree. The conception of subjection to a law without exception, without remission, without appeal, crushing, absolute, and universal, is truly an appalling one; and, most mercifully, can rarely be perceived in all its overwhelming force, except by minds which, through stern and lofty intellectual training, have in some degree become qualified to bear it.

Communion with God, we must ever bear in mind, is something very different from *prayer for specific blessings*, and often confers the submissive strength of soul for which we pray; and we believe it will be found that the higher our souls rise in their spiritual progress, the more does entreaty merge into thanksgiving, the more does *petition* become absorbed in communion with the "Father of the spirits of all flesh." That the piety of Christ was fast tending to this end is, we think, indicated by his instructions to his disciples (Matt. vi. 8, 9): "When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, for your father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him. After this manner, therefore, pray ye," &c.; and by that last sublime sentence in Gethsemane, uttered when the agonising struggle of the spirit with the flesh had terminated in the complete and final victory of the

first, "Father, if this cup may not pass from me except I drink it, thy will be done."

Prayer may be regarded as the form which devotion naturally takes in ordinary minds, and even in the most enlightened minds in their less spiritual moods. The highest intellectual efforts, the loftiest religious contemplations, dispose to devotion, but check the impulses of prayer. The devout philosopher, trained to the investigation of universal system—the serene astronomer, fresh from the study of the changeless laws which govern innumerable worlds—shrinks from the monstrous irrationality of asking the great Architect and Governor of all to work a miracle in his behalf—to interfere, for the sake of *his* convenience, or *his* plans, with the sublime order conceived by the Ancient of Days in the far Eternity of the Past; for what is a special providence but an interference with established laws? And what is such interference but a miracle?

IV. Remotely connected with the doctrine of an interposing and influencible Providence is the fallacy, or rather the imperfection, which lies at the root of the ordinary Christian view of *Resignation* as a duty and a virtue. Submission, cheerful acquiescence in the dispensations of Providence, is enjoined upon us, not because these dispensations are just and wise—not because they are the ordinances of His will who cannot err,—but because they are ordained for our benefit, and because He promised that "all things shall work together for good to them that love Him." We are assured that every trial and affliction is designed solely for our good, for our discipline, and will issue in a blessing, though we see not how; and that *therefore* we must bow to it with uncomplaining resignation. These grounds, it is obvious, are purely self-regarding; and resignation, thus represented and thus motivated, is no virtue, but a simple calculation of self-interest. This narrow view results from that incorrigible egotism of the human heart which makes man prone to regard him-

self as the special object of divine consideration, and the centre round which the universe revolves. Yet it is unquestionably the view most prominently and frequently presented in the new Testament and by all modern divines.¹ It may be that the prospect of "an exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory," may be needed to support our frail purposes under the crushing afflictions of our lot; it may be that, by the perfect arrangements of omnipotence, the sufferings of all may be made to work out the ultimate and supreme good of each; but this is not, cannot be, *the reason why* we should submit with resignation to whatever God ordains. His will must be wise, righteous, and we believe beneficent, whether it allot to *us* happiness or misery: it *is* His will; we need inquire no further. Job, who had no vision of a future compensatory world, had in this attained a sublimer point of religion than St. Paul:—"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." "What! shall we receive good at the hands of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job xiii. 15; ii. 10.)

To the orthodox Christian, who fully believes all he professes, cheerful resignation to the divine will is comparatively a natural, an easy, a simple thing. To the religious philosopher, it is the highest exercise of intellect and virtue. The man who has *realised* the faith that his own lot, in all its minutest particulars, is not only directly regulated by God,—but is so regulated by God as unerringly to work for his highest good,—with an express view to his highest good—with such a man, resignation, patience,

¹ The sublimest and purest genius among modern divines goes so far as to maintain that, apart from the hope of future recompense, "a deviation from rectitude would become the part of wisdom, and should the path of virtue be obstructed by disgrace, torment, or death, to persevere would be madness and folly." ("Modern Infidelity," p. 20, by Robert Hall.) It is sad to reflect how mercenary a thing duty has become in the hands of theologians. Were their belief in a future retribution once shaken, they would become, on their own showing, the lowest of sensualists, the worst of sinners.

may, cheerful acquiescence in all suffering and sorrow appears to be in fact only the simple and practical expression of his belief. If, believing all this, he still murmurs and rebels at the trials and contrarieties of his lot, he is guilty of the childishness of the infant which quarrels with the medicine that is to lead it back to health and ease. But the religious Philosopher,—who, sincerely holding that a Supreme God created and governed this world, holds also that He governs it by laws which, though wise, just, and beneficent, are yet steady, unwavering, inexorable;—who believe that his agonies and sorrows are not specially ordained for *his* chastening, *his* strengthening, *his* elaboration and development,—but are incidental and necessary results of the operation of laws the best that could be devised for the happiness and purification of the species,—or perhaps not even that, but the best adapted to work out the vast, awful, glorious, eternal designs of the Great Spirit of the universe; who believes that he ordained operations of Nature, which have brought misery to him, have, from the very unswerving tranquillity of their career, showered blessing and sunshine upon every other path,—that the unrelenting chariot of Time, which has crushed or maimed him in its allotted course, is pressing onward to the accomplishment of those serene and mighty purposes, to have contributed to which—even as a victim—is an honour and a recompense:—he who takes this view of Time, and Nature, and God, and yet bears his lot without murmur or distrust, because it is portion of a system, the best possible, *because ordained by God*,—has achieved a point of virtue, the highest, amid passive excellence, which humanity can reach;—and his reward and support must be found in the reflection that he is an unreluctant and self-sacrificing co-operator with the Creator of the universe, and in the noble consciousness of being worthy and capable of so sublime a conception, yet so sad a destiny.

In a comparison of the two resignations, there is no measure of their respective grandeurs. The orthodox sufferer fights the battle only on condition of surviving to reap the fruits of victory :—the other fights on, knowing that he must fall early in the battle, but content that his body should form a stepping-stone for the future conquests of humanity.

Somewhat similar remarks may be made with reference to the virtues of action as to those of endurance. It is a matter suggestive of much reflection, that, throughout the New Testament, the loftiest and purest motive to action—love of duty, *as* duty, obedience to the will of God *because* it is His will—is rarely appealed to ; one or two expressions of Christ and the 14th chapter of John forming the only exceptions. The almost invariable language—pitched to the level of ordinary humanity—is, “Do your duty at all hazards, for your Father which seeth in secret shall reward you openly.” “Verily, I say unto you, ye shall in no wise lose your reward.”

Yet this is scarcely the right view of things. The hope of success, not the hope of reward, should be our stimulating and sustaining might. Our object, not ourselves, should be our inspiring thought. The labours of philanthropy are comparatively easy, when the effect of them, and their recoil upon ourselves, is immediate and apparent. But this it can rarely be, unless where the field of our exertions is narrow, and ourselves the only or the chief labourers. In the more frequent cases where we have to join our efforts to those of thousands of others to contribute to the carrying forward of a great cause, merely to till the ground or sow the seed for a very distant harvest, or to prepare the way for the future advent of some great amendment ; the amount which each man has contributed to the achievement of ultimate success, the portion of the prize which justice should assign to each as his especial production, can never be accurately ascertained. Perhaps few of those who have laboured, in

the patience of secrecy and silence, to bring about some political or social change which they felt convinced would ultimately prove of vast service to humanity, may live to see the change effected, or the anticipated good flow from it. Fewer still of them will be able to pronounce what appreciable weight their several efforts contributed to the achievement of the change desired. And discouraging doubts will therefore often creep in upon minds in which egotism is not wholly swallowed up by earnestness, as to whether, in truth, their exertions had any influence whatever—whether in sad and sober fact they have not been the mere fly upon the wheel. With many men these doubts are fatal to active effort. To counteract them we must labour to elevate and purify our *motives*, as well as sedulously cherish the conviction—assuredly a true one—that in this world there is no such thing as effort thrown away—that “in all labour there is profit”—that all sincere exertion in a righteous and unselfish cause is necessarily followed, in spite of all appearance to the contrary, by an appropriate and proportionate success—that no bread cast upon the waters can be wholly lost—that no good seed planted in the ground can fail to fructify in due time and measure ; and that, however we may in moments of despondency be apt to doubt, not only whether our cause will triumph, but whether we shall have contributed to its triumph,—there is One who has not only seen every exertion we have made, but who can assign the exact degree in which each soldier has assisted to gain the great victory over social evil. The Augean stables of the world—the accumulated uncleanness and misery of centuries—require a mighty river to cleanse them thoroughly away : every drop we contribute aids to swell that river and augment its force, in a degree appreciable by God, though not by man ;—and he whose zeal is deep and earnest will not be over anxious that his individual drop should be distinguishable amid the mighty mass of

cleansing and fertilising waters, far less that, for the sake of distinction it should flow in effective singleness away. He will not be careful that his name should be inscribed upon the mite which he casts into the treasury of God. It should suffice each of us to know that, *if* we have laboured, with purity of purpose, in any good cause, we *must* have contributed to its success; that the degree in which we have contributed is a matter of infinitely small concern; and still more, that the consciousness of having so contributed, however obscurely and unnoticed, should be our sufficient, if our sole, reward. Let us cherish this faith; it is a duty. He who sows and reaps is a good labourer, and worthy of his hire. But he who sows what shall be reaped by others who know not and reckon not of the sower, is a labourer of a nobler order, and worthy of a loftier guerdon.

V. The common Christian conception of the pardon of sin upon repentance and conversion seems to us to embody a very transparent and pernicious fallacy. "Who can forgive sins but God only?" asked the Pharisees. There is great confusion and contradiction in our ideas on this subject. God is the only being who can *not* forgive sins. "Forgiveness of sins" means one of two things:—it either means saving a man from the consequences of his sins, that is, interposing between cause and effect, in which case it is *working a miracle* (which God no doubt can do, but which we have no right to expect that He will do, or ask that He shall do); or it means an *engagement to forbear retaliation*, a suppression of the natural anger felt against the offender by the offended party, a *foregoing of vengeance* on the part of the injured—in which meaning it is obviously quite inapplicable to a Being exempt and aloof from human passions. When we entreat a fellow-creature to forgive the offences we have committed against him, we mean to entreat that he will not, by any act of his, punish us for them, that he will not revenge nor repay them, that he will retain no rancour in his breast

against us on account of them; and such a prayer addressed to a being of like passions to ourselves is rational and intelligible, because we know that it is natural for him to feel anger at our injuries, and that, unless moved to the contrary, he will probably retaliate. But when we pray to our Heavenly Father to "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us," we overlook the want of parallelism of the two cases, and show that our notions on the subject are altogether misty and confused; for God cannot be *injured* by our sins, and He is inaccessible to the passions of anger and revenge. Yet the plain expression of the Book of Common Prayer—"Neither take Thou vengeance of our sins"—embodies the real significance attached to the prayer for forgiveness, by all who attach any definite signification to their prayers. Now, this expression is an *Old Testament* or a *Pagan* expression, and can only be consistently and intelligibly used by those who entertain the same low ideas of God as the ancient Greeks and Hebrews entertained—that is, who think of Him as an irritable, jealous, and avenging Potentate.

If, from this inconsistency, we take refuge in the other meaning of the Prayer for forgiveness, and assume that it is a prayer to God that he will exempt us from the natural and appointed consequences of our misdeeds, it is important that we should clearly define to our minds what it is that we are asking for. In our view of the matter, punishment for sins by the divine law is a wholly different thing and process from punishment for violations of human laws. It is not an infliction for crime, imposed by an external authority and artificially executed by external force, but a natural and inevitable result of the offence—a child generated by a parent—a sequence following an antecedent—a consequence arising out of a cause.

The punishment of sin *consists* in the consequences of sin. These form a penalty most adequately heavy. A sin without its punishment is as impossible,

as complete a contradiction in terms, as a cause without an effect.

To pray that God will forgive our sins, therefore, appears in all logical accuracy to involve either a most unworthy conception of His character, or an entreaty of incredible audacity—viz., that He will work daily miracles in our behalf. It is either beseeching Him to renounce feelings and intentions which it is impossible that a Nature like His should entertain: or it is asking Him to violate the eternal and harmonious order of the universe, for the comfort of one out of the infinite myriads of its inhabitants.

It may, perhaps, be objected, that Punishment of sins may be viewed, not as a vengeance taken for injury or insult committed, nor yet as the simple and necessary sequence of a cause—but as *chastisement*, inflicted to work repentance and amendment. But, even when considered in this light, prayer for forgiveness remains still a marvellous inconsistency. It then becomes the entreaty of the sick man to his Physician not to heal him. "Forgive us our sins," then means, "Let us continue in our iniquity." It is clear, however, that the first meaning we have mentioned, as attached to the prayer for forgiveness of sins, is both the original and the prevailing one; and that it arises from an entire misconception of the character of the Deity, and of the feelings with which He may be supposed to regard sin—a misconception inherited from our Pagan and Jewish predecessors; it is a prayer to deprecate the just resentment of a Potentate whom we have offended—a petition which would be more suitably addressed to an earthly foe or master than to a Heavenly Father. The misconception is natural to a rude state of civilisation and of theology. It is the same notion from which arose sacrifices (*i.e.*, offerings to appease wrath), and which caused their universality in early ages and among barbarous nations. It is a relic of anthropomorphism; a belief that God, like man, is *enraged* by neglect or disobedience, and can be *pacified* by submission

and entreaty; a belief consistent and intelligible among the Greeks, inconsistent and irrational among Christians, appropriate as applied to Jupiter, unmeaning or blasphemous as applied to Jehovah.

We have, in fact, come to regard sin, not as an injury done to our own nature, an offence against our own souls, a disfiguring of the image of the Beautiful and Good, but as a personal affront offered to a powerful and avenging Being, which, unless *apologised* for, will be chastised as such. We have come to regard it as an injury to *another* party, for which atonement and reparation can be made and satisfaction can be given; not as a deed which cannot be undone, eternal in its consequences; an act which, once committed, is numbered with the irrevocable past. In a word, Sin *contains* its own retributive penalty as surely, and as naturally, as the acorn contains the oak. Its consequence is its punishment, it needs no other, and can have no heavier: and its consequence is involved in its commission, and cannot be separated from it. *Punishment* (let us fix this in our minds) *is not the execution of a sentence, but the occurrence of an effect.* It is ordained to follow guilt by God, not as a Judge, but as the Creator and Legislator of the Universe. This conviction once settled in our understandings, will wonderfully clear up our views on the subject of pardon and redemption. Redemption becomes then, of necessity, not a saving but a regenerating process. We can be saved from the punishment of sin only by being saved from its commission. Neither *can* there be any such thing as a vicarious atonement or punishment (which, again, is a relic of heathen conceptions of an angered Deity, to be propitiated by offerings and sacrifices). Punishment, being not the penalty, but the result of sin, being not an arbitrary and artificial annexation, but an ordinary and logical consequence, cannot be borne by other than the sinner.

It is curious that the votaries of the doctrines of the Atonement admit the correctness of much of the above reason-

ing, saying (see "Guesses at Truth," by J. and A. Hare), that Christ had to suffer for the sins of men, because God could *could not* forgive sin; He must punish in some way. Thus holding the strangely inconsistent doctrine that God is so just that He could not let sin go unpunished, yet so unjust that He could punish it in the person of the innocent. It is for orthodox dialects to explain how Divine Justice can be *impugned* by pardoning the guilty, and yet *vindicated* by punishing the innocent!

If the foregoing reflections are sound, the awful, yet wholesome, conviction presses upon our minds, that *there can be no forgiveness of sins*; that is, no interference with, or remittance of, or protection from their natural effects; that God will not interpose between the cause and its consequence¹;—that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." An awful consideration this; yet all reflection, all experience, confirm its truth. The sin which has debased our soul may be repented of, may be turned from, but the injury is done: the debasement may be redeemed by after efforts, the stain may be obliterated by bitterer struggles and severer sufferings, by faith in God's love and communion with His Spirit; but the efforts and the endurance which might have raised the soul to the loftiest heights are now exhausted in merely regaining what it has lost. "There must always be a wide difference (as one of our divines has said) between him who only ceases to do evil, and him who has always done well; between the man who began to serve his God as soon as he knew that he had a God to serve, and the man who only turns to Heaven after he has exhausted all the indulgences of Earth."

¹ Refer to Matt. ix. 2-6. "Whether it is easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee! or to say, Arise, take up thy bed and walk?" Jesus seems here clearly to intimate that the view taken above (of forgiveness of sins, namely, involving an interference with the natural order of sequence, and being therefore a *miracle*) is correct. He places the two side by side, as equally difficult.

Again, in the case of sin of which you have induced another to partake. You may repent—*you* may, after agonising struggles, regain the path of virtue—*your* spirit may re-achieve its purity through much anguish, and after many stripes; but the weaker fellow-creature whom you led astray, whom you made a sharer in your guilt, but whom you cannot make a sharer in your repentance and amendment, whose downward course (the first step of which you taught) you cannot check, but are compelled to witness, what "forgiveness" of sins can avail you there? *There* is your perpetual, your inevitable punishment, which no repentance can alleviate and no mercy can remit.

This doctrine, that sins may be forgiven, and the consequences of them averted, has in all ages been a fertile source of mischief. Perhaps few of our intellectual errors have fructified in a vaster harvest of evil, or operated more powerfully to impede the moral progress of our race. While it has been a source of unspeakable comfort to the penitent, a healing balm to the wounded spirit, while it has saved many from hopelessness, and enabled those to recover themselves who would otherwise have flung away the remnant of their virtue in despair; yet, on the other hand, it has encouraged millions, *feeling what a safety was in store for them in ultimate resort*, to persevere in their career of folly or crime, to ignore or despise those natural laws which God has laid down to be the guides and beacons of our conduct, to continue to do "that which was pleasant in their own eyes," convinced that nothing was irrevocable, that however dearly they might have to pay for re-integration, repentance could at any time redeem their punishment, and *undo the past*. The doctrine has been noxious in exact ratio to the baldness and nakedness with which it has been propounded. In the Catholic Church of the middle ages we see it perhaps in its greatest form, when pardon was sold, bargained for, rated at a fixed price; when one hoary sinner,

on the bed of sickness, refused to repent, because he was not *certain* that death was close at hand, and he did not wish for the trouble of going through the process twice, and was loth, by a premature amendment, to lose a chance of any of the indulgences of sin. Men would have been far more scrupulous watchers over conduct, far more careful of their deeds, had they believed that those deeds would inevitably bear their natural consequences, exempt from after intervention, than when they held that penitence and pardon could at any time unlink the chain of sequences; just as now they are little scrupulous of indulging in hurtful excess, when medical aid is at hand to remedy the mischief they have voluntarily encountered. But were they on a desert island, apart from the remotest hope of a doctor or a drug, how far more closely would they consider the consequences of each indulgence, how earnestly would they study the laws of Nature, how comparatively unswerving would be their endeavours to steer their course by those laws, obedience to which brings health, peace, and safety in its train!

Let any one look back upon his past career—look inward on his daily life—and then say what effect would be produced upon him, were the conviction once fixedly embedded in his soul, that everything done is done irrevocably—that even the Omnipotence of God cannot *uncommit* a deed—cannot make that undone which has been done; that every act *must* bear its allotted fruit according to the everlasting laws—must remain for ever ineffaceably inscribed on the tablets of universal Nature. And then let him consider what would have been the result upon the moral condition of our race, had all men ever held this conviction.

Perhaps you have led a youth of dissipation and excess which has undermined and enfeebled your constitution,

and you have transmitted this injured and enfeebled constitution to your children. They suffer, in consequence, through life; suffering, perhaps even sin, is *entailed* upon them; your repentance were it in sackcloth and ashes, can help you or them. Your punishment, tremendous, but it is legitimate and inevitable. You have broken Nature's laws, or you have ignored them; and no one violates or neglects them with impunity. What a lesson for timely reflection and obedience is here!

Again,—You have broken the seventh commandment. You grieve, you repent, you resolutely determine against any such weakness in future. It is well. But “you know that God is merciful, you feel that he will forgive you.” You are comforted. But no—there is no forgiveness of sins: the injured party may forgive you, your accomplice or victim may forgive you, according to the meaning of human language; *but the deed is done*, and all the powers of Nature, were they to conspire in your behalf, could not make it undone: the consequences to the body, the consequences to the soul, though no man may perceive them, *are there*, are written in the annals of the Past, and must reverberate through all time.

But all this, let it be understood, in no degree militates against the value or the necessity of repentance. Repentance, contrition of soul, bears, like every other act, its own fruit, the fruit of purifying the heart, of amending the future, not, as man has hitherto conceived, of effacing the Past. The commission of sin is an irrevocable act, but it does not incapacitate the soul for virtue. Its consequences cannot be expunged, but its course need not be pursued. Sin, though it is ineffaceable, calls for no despair, but for efforts more energetic than before. Repentance is still as valid as ever; but it is valid to secure the future, not to obliterate the past.

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